the weekly standard

JULY 7 / JULY 14, 2008 • $4.95

FRENCH JOURNALISM ON TRIAL
ANNE-ELISABETH MOUTET

Summer Reading

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The Coming Tax Hike—and How to Head it Off

Disrupting our economy while leaving the deficit virtually untouched? Not a good idea.

As the presidential campaign enters its endgame, expect more debate over budget priorities and how to pay for them. Do we need tax hikes to restore near-term budget balance and finance longer-term entitlement growth? In a word, no. Such claims fail both budget arithmetic and economic sense. Worse, they undercut the nation's fiscal policies and its commitment to economic growth.

Federal revenues are already high, yet we stand on the verge of a very large tax increase if the Bush tax cuts expire. The personal income tax burden would rise to its highest point in history, relative to GDP. Economic damage caused by the tax increases and tax-avoidance behavior would choke off any promised revenues (and, more immediately, hobble the eventual economic recovery). Meanwhile, the lure of higher revenues would sustain Congress's wasteful ways. A better idea is to fix entitlements to slow their cost growth, cut nonessential spending, and promote economic growth: the greater the growth, the larger the pie.

— By John F. Cogan and R. Glenn Hubbard

A Modest Proposal for Middle East Peace

How to get through to Israel? Let places such as Kashmir, Cyprus, and Tibet lead the way.

Maybe it's time for a new, global approach to Israel and its occupation. Let's get the whole world talking about disputed capitals, the right of return for refugees, land under occupation, the creation of artificial post–World War II states, and the use of force against suspected Islamist terrorists. But why not make it interesting? Let's look for solutions to apply everywhere, not just in Israel.

Perhaps the world could impose a big-power "road map" on long-divided Cyprus. Or relieve all displaced populations—the Germans expelled from East Prussia, this Indians uprooted from ancestral homes in what is now Pakistan, the half-million Jews deported from Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and Syria after 1967. Can we promise them all the right to return? Then there's lost territory—much of Azerbaijan taken by Armenia, Tibet swallowed up by China—and artificial states (should Pakistan even exist? North Korea?). Surely the world that solves these problems will have much to teach Israel about humility and concessions.

—Paul R. Gregory

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THIS IS A COMBINED ISSUE. THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE WEEKLY STANDARD WILL APPEAR IN TWO WEEKS.

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BPA INTERNATIONAL

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The Enthusiasms of *Newsweek*

The Scrapbook was a little surprised by last week's cover of *Newsweek*—no heroic portrait of Barack Obama?—and so, slowly and a little hesitantly, dove in.

Sure enough, on Page One, there was a scowling double portrait of the McCains, standing awkwardly on an airport tarmac. And this was followed, on Page Four, by a shot of a thoughtful Barack Obama, gazing into the future. Underneath Obama these words were inscribed—"John McCain's years on Capitol Hill make him more qualified for the White House than Barack Obama, who spent most of his time in office in the Illinois Legislature, right? Think again . . . "—at which point The Scrapbook quickly skipped to the popular "Conventional Wisdom Watch" feature, where an arrow pointed upward for—yes, Michelle Obama. Nor did the "Perspectives" page disappoint: There was one cute snapshot of young Barack Obama and his grandfather, one tart quotation from Michelle Obama . . . and then an eight-page, faintly hostile, profile of Mrs. John McCain—"In Search of Cindy McCain"—which The Scrapbook bypassed to confront a stunning photograph of Barack Obama striding purposefully up the Capitol steps.

To which The Scrapbook responded by throwing our issue of *Newsweek* skyward, and finding it opened, when it fell back to earth, to a full-page portrait of the late R. Buckminster Fuller, and a three-page tribute entitled "Bucky's Very Large Dome."

Dueling Headlines

Fuel Costs May Force Some Kids To Walk

Montgomery Weighs Altering School Bus Rules

By Daniel de Vise
Washington Post Staff Writer

Washington Post, June 23, 2008

Obesity Battle Continues

Advocates Push to Keep Kids Moving

By Lori Aratani
Washington Post Staff Writer

Classes are out for children

Washington Post, June 24, 2008

To be honest, we had thought that the ghost of Buckminster Fuller (1895-1983) had been thankfully dormant for the past quarter-century, but how wrong we were. Not only is Manhattan's trendy Whitney Museum putting on a retrospective in his honor, but *Newsweek* resurrects, for a few minutes' duration, the reputation of one of the arch cranks of the sixties.

Fuller, who was inordinately proud of his New England Transcendentalist family background, was a college dropout and failed engineer, inventor, and architect, but successful futurist. He is best known for his design of the geodesic dome—last seen at the U.S. pavilion at Montreal's Expo '67—but lesser known is his legacy of leaking buildings, collapsed houses, unbuildable structures, and The Scrapbook's favorite, the 1933 Dymaxion car, which has no rear window. "Buckminster Fuller's inventions didn't always work," *Newsweek* helpfully explains, "but his ideas still inspire."

Well, while not quite comprehending what it's done, *Newsweek* does put its finger on the key to Fuller's renown: "[He] spent decades developing his theories and inventions, but he hit it big in the 1960s . . . as a kind of guru for the Woodstock generation." Translation: You had to be either a drug-crazed hippie or a philosophical adherent of Flower Power to take Bucky seriously.

Newsweek continues: "There's the timeliness of Fuller's holistic approach. He called himself a 'comprehensivist': he was an interdisciplinary thinker who blurred the boundaries between art and science, and liked to use the then new term 'synergy.' . . . A catalog of his inventions doesn't do justice, though, to the free-ranging ideas that scratched around inside Fuller's own dome. . . . [H]e dreamed up fantastical structures that floated in the sky,

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(Classic Steiner, reprinted from our issue of July 29, 2002)

which he called 'Cloud Nine'; he proposed a clear dome over Manhattan; a tetrahedron suburb in San Francisco Bay, and he patented a scheme for an underwater city."

Did we mention that "Al Gore likes to quote him and his words are in the Kyoto Protocol . . . [and] his outlook was global, not national, and he believed that technology, if properly harnessed, could solve the problems of what he referred to as 'Spaceship Earth'"?

What Fuller did best had nothing to do with bridges across the Mediterranean Sea, or stilts for traversing the Everglades, or colonies of fine old New England families on Mars. R. Buckminster Fuller was a 20th-century specimen of a very ancient breed: the intellectual as confidence man, beginning with visions of sprucing up the Earth and ending with regiments of cultists and disciples, and publishing memoirs called *I Seem to Be a Verb*.

Of course, The Scrapbook believes that *Newsweek*'s enthusiasm for Sen. Barack (Change We Can Believe In) Obama bears no resemblance to its faith in Bucky Fuller. ♦

Kennedy's Footnote

Buried in Justice Anthony Kennedy's majority opinion in *Kennedy* v. *Louisiana* is a remarkable citation. Making the inarguable point that "a State that punishes child rape by death may remove a strong incentive for the rapist not to kill the victim," Kennedy mysteriously feels the need to point curious readers to a *St. John's Law Review* article by Corey Rayburn Yung, a former clerk on the Eighth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. You can get the gist of the article from the state-of-the art academic wordplay in its title: "Better Dead Than R(ap)ed?: The Patriarchal Rhetoric Driving Capital Rape Statutes."

Proponents of applying the death penalty to child rapists, per Yung, are driven by "a new, but very old, rhetoric." Yung doesn't explain how something can be both "new" and "very old," but he does argue that "as long as populations and politicians can make the appeal that rape is an evil worse than death, they can push these laws with a load of Victorian, patriarchal baggage attached." Writes Yung,

> When womyn's lives are leveraged into a utilitarian calculus that values chastity over survival, the Victorian shackles that feminism has sought to break reassert themselves in insidious fashion. Womyn's choices to live or die are then judged by cultural norms derived from patriarchy.

This is academic mumbo-jumbo. Also, as you can see in the above passage, it's riddled with spelling errors. Yung writes in one of his many footnotes, "I choose to adopt the gender-neutral term 'womyn' to refer to the people more commonly called 'women.'" Whatever you say, Corey.

From now on, The Scrapbook chooses to adopt the term "idiotz" to refer to the people more commonly called "former law clerks drunk on pomo feminist legal theory." ♦

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Casual

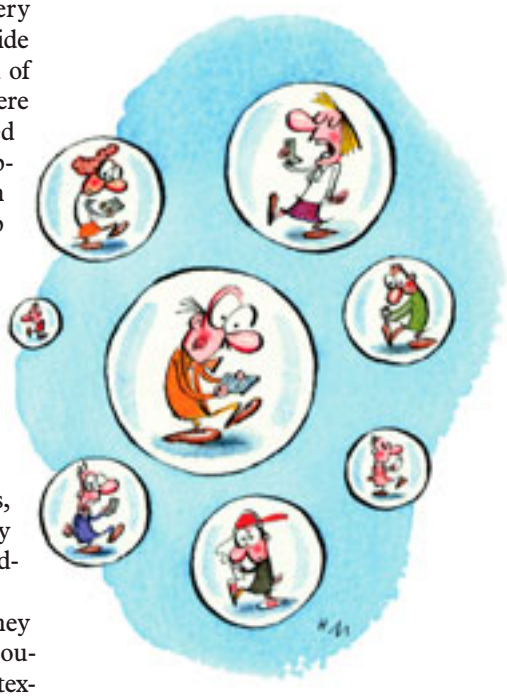
Lost in the Personasphere

I was with my kids at Zuma beach, in Malibu. It was night. We were alone. A full moon had risen over the Pacific. As far as you could see into a scrim of mist and scattered light, a succession of breakers rolled up the beach, cresting and cresting again, throwing crowns of silvery foam before them, and under the wide sky the air was still and the sound of the waves was the only sound there was. We found ourselves suspended in a kind of ancient quiet that is supposed to be impossible in Southern California. It sometimes sneaks up on you anyway, embraces you and makes your blood rise and your skin suddenly cool, and with the moon shadows all around us I turned to son and daughter to share the unexpected moment.

And when I turned I caught their faces in the glow—in the glow of their flipped-open cell phones, which they were tapping furiously with their thumbs. They were sending text messages.

I don't know what messages they were texting, or which of their thousands of acquaintances they were texting; I'm not even sure when I started using "text" as a verb. I don't think they were trying to capture in words the magic of the moment and the place, and to send the words coursing through the ether to share their awe and joy with distant friends. They had left the beach and that boring old moon behind, in spirit if not in body. They were both of them elsewhere, lost in their private personaspheres of unending communication. The personasphere is where more and more of us spend our time, oblivious, or at least inattentive, to what's happening right in front of us.

My first glimpse of the personasphere came several years ago at a county fair. It was like all county fairs, an all-American overload of colored lights and hurdy-gurdy noise and questionable smells. I'd always thought it was an experience that nobody could be bored by. Then I saw a gaggle of four teenage girls walking together



HAL MAYFORTH

along the midway. They were yacking away, as teenage girls, you might have noticed, sometimes do—but they were yacking into their cell phones. Walking four abreast, they were huddled in their personaspheres, each in her customized bubble, talking to someone who was far away instead of the friends that plan or chance had placed beside her. They were lost not only to one another but to the noise and color around them.

Since then, the appliances that furnish a personasphere have grown in number and complication. Walk down any city street and you'll see people deploying one gadget or another to construct their bubble, ignoring the nearby in favor of the faraway. Here comes a kid talking excitedly into a cell phone, followed by a businessman calling up a webpage from his iPhone, followed by an office hack scrolling through the messages on his Treo. Meanwhile, life erupts all over the place, unnoticed. If this were a just world, I'd get to see at least one of these busy people walk into a lamppost or fall through an open manhole, the way people used to do in silent movies. They never do, though, at least not while I'm around. This must not be a just world.

But it is a very distracted one—though maybe *distraction* isn't the fitting word. A distraction is supposed to be something that draws you away from immediate experience, pulls your attention from the matter at hand. The personasphere involves experience once removed, pressed through a piece of hardware; in the personasphere, immediate experience is the distraction, an annoyance that takes you from the now-primary business of texting, phoning, web-surfing—being elsewhere. Faced with the real world, we draw our personaspheres over us like a cloak against the cold.

I'm a silver-lining guy, as my friends will tell you, always searching for the upside in any given situation, so I'll mention one nice thing about this cocooning, this withdrawal of everyone into his own personasphere: It has served to prove the techno-utopians wrong once again. From the dawn of the Internet through the coming of the Wi-Fi era, the utopians told us that technology would pull us together and restore a common life to a fragmented culture.

We can see how mistaken they were. Consider the man lost in his personasphere, at dinner, on a bus, in an elevator, scheming into a cellphone or tapping a message on his BlackBerry. If technology has brought him closer to distant friends it has also made it easier to detach himself from those near at hand. As his world expands, it shrinks—roughly to the size of his busy, excitable, unutterably lonely self.

Andrew Ferguson

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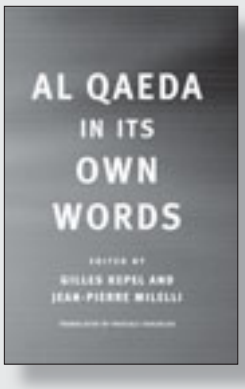

AL QAEDA IN ITS OWN WORDS

EDITED BY GILLES KEPEL AND JEAN-PIERRE MILELLI

INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY THOMAS HEGGHAMMER, STEPHANE LACROIX, JEAN-PIERRE MILELLI, AND OMAR SAGHI
TRANSLATED BY PASCALE GHAZALEH

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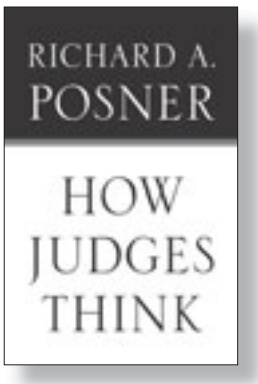

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the weekly Standard

An Indecent Decision

What are the scariest words in constitutional law these days? "Justice Kennedy delivered the opinion of the Court."

Earlier this term, Kennedy wrote the 5-4 opinion that extended habeas corpus rights to foreigners captured abroad and held on foreign soil. Such a right had never been granted in American history. This was a victory for the terrorists held at Camp Delta in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, who now can challenge their detention in federal courts.

For his next trick, Kennedy wrote last week another 5-4 opinion declaring the death penalty for child rapists unconstitutional. In so doing, the Court invalidated statutes in six states and quashed similar laws under consideration in five other states. Chalk this up as an emphatic defeat for constitutional self-government and a victory for petitioner Patrick Kennedy, the New Orleans man who in 1998 brutally raped his then-8-year-old stepdaughter. Kennedy (no relation to our justice) was sentenced to death in 2003. Now he'll live.

You don't have to support the death penalty in order to find the Court's decision appalling. The reasoning is terribly flawed. The intellectual backflips Justice Kennedy performed in his opinion would be impressive if they weren't so offensive to constitutionalist sensibilities.

First, the justice argued that "there is a national consensus against capital punishment for the crime of child rape." How did he determine this? By observing that only six states have statutes allowing the death penalty in such cases. "By contrast, 44 States have not made child rape a capital offense." But this judicial beancounting ignores the difficulties legislatures face in enacting capital punishment laws thanks to recent Supreme Court precedent.

Kennedy acknowledged that "in the last 13 years there has been change towards making child rape a capital offense." He noted that "this is evidenced by six new death penalty statutes, three enacted in the last two years." At the time of the ruling, five additional states were considering allowing the death penalty in cases of child rape. Some might see here evidence of a shift in public opinion. Not Kennedy. "That five States may have had pending legislation authorizing death for child rape is not dispositive," he wrote, "because it is not this Court's practice . . . to find contemporary norms based on legislation proposed but not yet enacted." Better to just make up the norms instead.

Next, Kennedy concluded that the "death penalty is not a proportional punishment for the crime of child rape." Why not? Here the justice broke out his well-worn "evolving standards of decency." "There is a distinction," he wrote, "between intentional first-degree murder on the one hand and nonhomicide crimes against individuals, even including child rape, on the other." Of course there is. Every type of crime is distinct. That is why we elect legislatures to write statutes that determine which punishments fit which crimes. Is it really so indecent of some legislatures to think the rape of an 8-year-old merits the same sanction as homicide?

Kennedy admits that "rape has a permanent psychological, emotional, and sometimes physical impact on the child. . . . We cannot dismiss the years of long anguish that must be endured by the victim of child rape." But dismiss them is exactly what the majority did when it decided by fiat that there is an "incongruity between the crime of child rape and the harshness of the death penalty."

That "incongruity" is never fully explained. The majority did not rule that the death penalty is unconstitutional. Nor did it rule that capital punishment will henceforth be limited to homicide. Kennedy wrote, "the rule of evolving standards of decency . . . means that resort to the penalty must be reserved for the worst of crimes and limited in its instances of application." This implies that no state may deem among the "worst of crimes" the irrevocable sexual violation of an innocent, however young. Justice Kennedy said the death penalty remains applicable to drug kingpins. Aren't recidivist child predators at the very least as morally depraved as narcotraffickers? Or is it evidence of unevolved standards to think so?

There's a political lesson here, which is that the fight to turn the Court from a capricious and imperious vanguard of liberalism into an impassive umpire is far from over. Indeed, the next president will have the opportunity to shape the Court for the next generation. Both John McCain and Barack Obama said they disagreed with Justice Kennedy's opinion. But Obama has also said his model justices include some of those who voted with the majority. Meanwhile, Obama voted against Justice Roberts and Alito, both of whom dissented from the Court's ruling.

For his part, McCain says he'll appoint more justices like Roberts and Alito. He could take this opportunity to explain how his judicial philosophy differs from Obama's, and why it matters. It's simple. No more Justice Kennedys.

—Matthew Continetti, for the Editors

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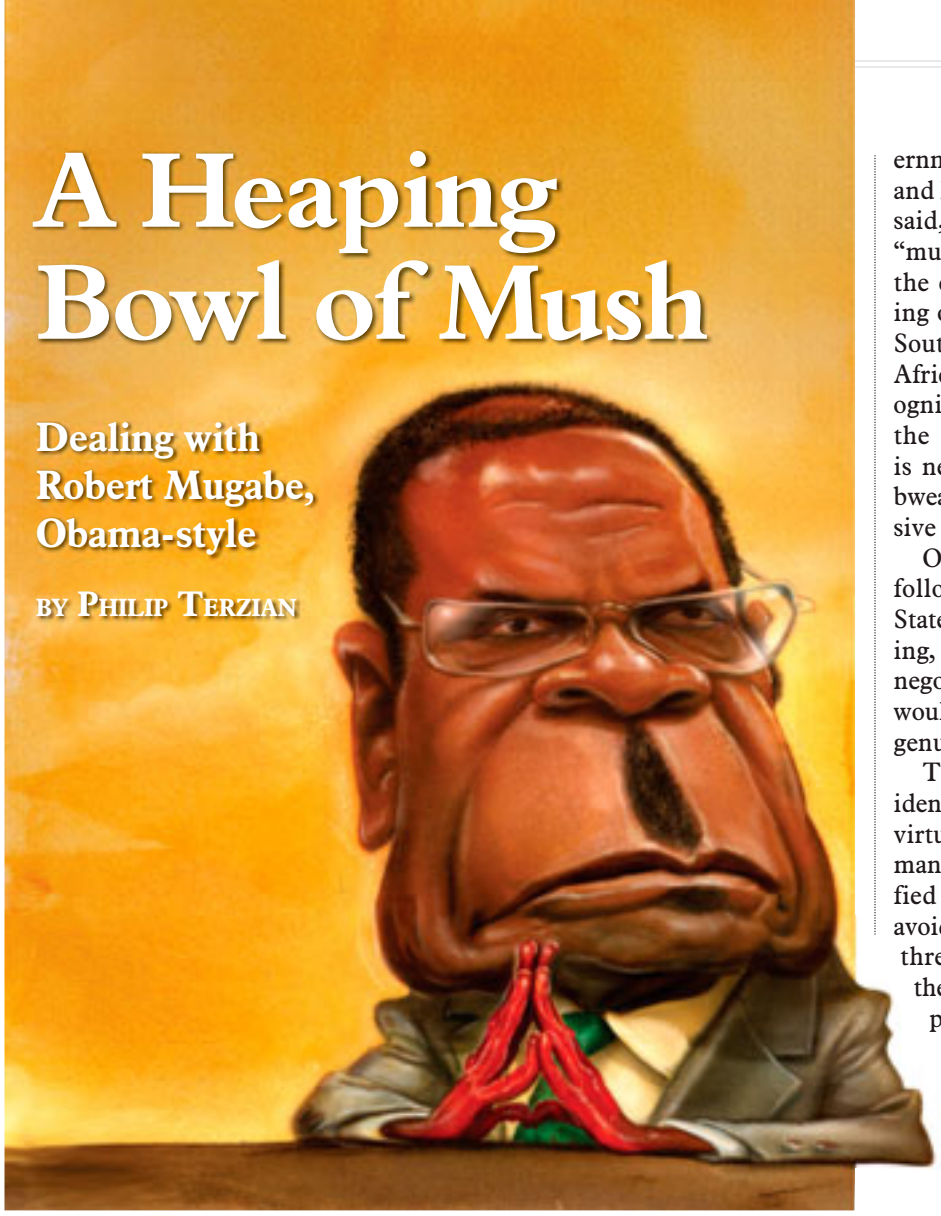
A Heaping Bowl of Mush

Dealing with Robert Mugabe, Obama-style

BY PHILIP TERZIAN



If inspirational claptrap is the stuff of diplomacy, then Barack Obama should flourish in the White House.

Consider his recent pronouncement on events in Zimbabwe. Conditions in the former British colony of Rhodesia could not be more horrific. After nearly 30 years of independence, presided over by the Marxist tyrant and psychotic Robert Mugabe, the country, once the "breadbasket of Africa," has reverted to something resembling an atavistic state. The economy is essentially dysfunctional, inflation has wiped out savings and capital, "food shortages" have given way to starvation, and the daily life of most Zimbabweans is a combination of grubbing for subsistence and avoiding the attention of Mugabe's armed thugs.

Foreign journalists who report on events are harassed, detained, and expelled from the country; Zimbabwean journalists are routinely murdered. Last week, when the opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai withdrew from Mugabe's rigged balloting for president—citing personal peril and violence against his followers—he sought refuge in the Dutch embassy in Harare, the capital city.

At which point, Senator Obama threw down the gauntlet, making three salient points. First, "the United States and the international community must be united, clear and unequivocal," he declared. "The government of Zimbabwe is illegitimate and lacks any credibility." Second, he said, Zimbabwe's African neighbors "must do much more to help prevent the crisis in Zimbabwe from spiraling out of control." And finally, "the South African government and [the African National Congress] must recognize the need—and must call for—the kind of diplomatic action that is necessary to pressure the Zimbabwean government to stop its repressive behavior."

Obama's three declarations were followed by a call for "the United States to tighten our sanctions," leading, in due course, to "an enforceable, negotiated political transition . . . that would end repressive rule and enable genuine democracy to take root."

The presumptive Democratic presidential nominee's statement has the virtue of what we might call statesmanlike rhetoric, is reliant on a unified international community, and avoids any Bush-like calls to arms or threats of unilateral action against the government of Zimbabwe or its president.

But as with all diplomatic language, it is equally instructive to boil Obama's rhetoric down to its essentials. To begin with, any unequivocal statement—by the United States, the United Nations, Zimbabwe's African neighbors, or the Organization of African Unity—that Mugabe's government is "illegitimate" or "lacks credibility" is roughly comparable to declaring that the German chancellor (Angela Merkel) is a woman. Not only is there near-universal agreement that Mugabe's regime is illegitimate, and has been for years, it is comical to suggest that its defect is "credibility." President Mugabe's problem is not integrity or the value of his word; it is the fact that he is a (quite credible) tyrant and mass killer of his people.

And while no one would oppose encouraging Zimbabwe's African neighbors to "prevent the crisis . . . from spiraling out of control"—what, if anything, does that mean? Is Senator Obama persuaded that there

GARY LOCKE

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is room for things to get worse in Zimbabwe, in which case the international community should monitor events for incipient signs of spiraling? Or does he fear the export of Mugabe's brand of misrule to Zambia, Mozambique, Botswana, and South Africa? This is the sort of earnest nonsense and terminological inexactitude that used to drive Winston Churchill to distraction.

Of greatest interest, however, is Obama's charge to the South Africans and the African National Congress. To be sure, this is of special concern since the South African president, Thabo Mbeki, has been notably reluctant to criticize Mugabe—indeed, even to acknowledge problems in Zimbabwe—while the ANC is, at best, divided on the issue. What Obama demands, however, is for the ANC and the Johannesburg government to "recognize the need . . . for the kind of diplomatic action that is necessary to pressure the Zimbabwean government to stop its repressive behavior."

It might be helpful, in this instance, to review the previous sentence. For, in trademark stentorian tones and calibrated syllables, Obama asks the South Africans to, please, *consider* the necessity of *diplomatic* action. Not to *take* diplomatic action, it should be emphasized, but to *acknowledge* the *necessity* of *considering* diplomatic action. Which suggestion, no doubt, President Mbeki will take under advisement.

What all this reveals, of course, is not that Robert Mugabe is monstrous, or that Barack Obama has mastered rhetorical sleight-of-hand, but that Zimbabwe languishes in catastrophic straits, that Mugabe is likely to strengthen his stranglehold, that thousands of Zimbabweans are destined to be killed—and that not much can be done about it. The United Nations is officially unhappy about circumstances in Zimbabwe, but Mugabe's allies in the General Assembly and the Security Council have effectively prevented any definitive statement of purpose. The Organization of African Unity is disinclined to break ranks against one of the last surviving anticolonial guerrillas, and the governments surrounding Zimbabwe are probably incapable of challenging Mugabe's armed forces.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has said all the right things on the subject, but the United States cannot persuade the Africans to act against what they perceive to be their self-interest, and there is no prospect whatsoever of American—or European or any variety of multilateral— intervention. Even America's senior Nobel Peace laureate, Jimmy Carter, has been uncharacteristically silent—and with good reason, since it was the Carter State Department, in 1978, that turned its back on the moderate Methodist bishop Abel Muzorewa, who had sought accommodation with Rhodesia's white settlers, in favor of the charismatic gunman Mugabe.

It is worth mentioning that no one—not Obama, no U.S. observer, or any interested European or African—has wondered if, say, some French or Belgian or British soldier of fortune might be willing for a small consideration to rid Zimbabwe of its oppressor. That, of course, would be morally unacceptable, while "tighten[ing] our existing sanctions"—and doubling the misery of poor Zimbabweans—is the principled alternative. ♦

Closing the Enthusiasm Gap

McCain and Obama, by the numbers.

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

About the time political reporters were sitting down to lunch on June 24, BlackBerries all over Washington buzzed with an unusual email. The pollsters for John McCain's campaign sent out a memo challenging the findings of a poll conducted by the *Los Angeles Times* and Bloomberg. Hundreds of polls are released during a typical campaign without such a public objection. One finding in particular caught their attention. According to the *L.A. Times*, 22 percent of those surveyed identified themselves as Republicans, 39 percent as Democrats, and 27 percent as independents. The party identification in this poll, argued McCain's pollsters, "is greatly out of line with what most other surveys are reporting."

They're right. And that fact probably helps explain why the *L.A. Times*/Bloomberg poll has Barack Obama beating John McCain by 15 points (in a field including Nader and Barr)—a much larger margin than most other respected polls. (The Gallup daily tracking poll, the McCain campaign eagerly points out, has McCain down just 3 points.)

McCain's pollsters point to the findings of other surveys on party identification. That they would do this suggests just how damaged the Republican party brand is heading into the 2008 general election. Although the *L.A. Times*/Bloomberg poll shows a larger gap between Democrats and Republicans than all others—+17 for Democrats—the news for Republicans is uniformly bad.

Among the numbers the McCain campaign highlighted: AP/Ipsos's +14 for Democrats; CBS News/*New York Times*'s +14 for Democrats;

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and Democracy Corps's +12 for Democrats. The average advantage for Democrats in the ten surveys the McCain campaign cited was 9.3 points. So Republicans are clearly at a significant disadvantage.

The conventional wisdom, adopted and internalized by many on the McCain campaign, is that McCain must move to the center to appeal to independents. So that's largely what he's done. Immediately after McCain became the de facto nominee, he toured the country touting his biography. Shortly after that he spent a week on a trip informally dubbed the "Places Republicans Don't Go" tour. Not long afterwards, he traveled to Washington and Oregon talking about global warming. He has launched radio ads explicitly targeting Hispanics and last month held secret meetings with Hispanic and gay leaders. Twice in recent weeks, McCain has participated in virtual town halls targeting disaffected Democrats and moderates.

One could reasonably argue that the strategy is working. In fact, McCain made that argument himself at a fundraiser in Las Vegas last week. "It's good to see yourself running, for us to be, most polls show us frankly two, three, four points down," said McCain. "That's good for this stage of the game, particularly considering the headwind we have on our economy. And I'd like to give you a little straight talk. There was a poll last week that showed me three points down from Sen. Obama and the Republican party 19 points down from the Democrats."

Not bad. But it is a strategy that carries considerable risks. By running as a centrist, McCain risks further alienating conservatives, the voters most responsible for getting George W. Bush elected twice. The *Washington Post* reported that conservative turnout "soared" in 2004, climbing above the impressive level that the Bush campaign reached in 2000. McCain's campaign isn't worried.

"Where are they going to go?" asks one McCain adviser, expressing a sentiment I've heard from several others.

One possibility: nowhere. Unmotivated by a candidate who would rather talk about global warming than gay marriage, conservatives might simply stay home. This lack of enthusiasm for McCain among conservatives was evident in the *Washington Post*/ABC News poll taken in mid-June. Ninety-one percent of those who identified themselves as Obama supporters say they are "enthusiastic" about their candidate; 54 percent say they are "very enthusiastic." Seventy-three percent of self-identified McCain supporters say they are "enthusiastic" about his candidacy; but only 17 percent say they are "very enthusiastic." More ominous, while almost half of the liberals surveyed are enthusiastic about Obama, only 13 percent of conservatives are enthusiastic about McCain.

Republican pollster David Winston believes that McCain can close

MICHAEL RAMIREZ

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this enthusiasm gap by campaigning on issues where there are sharp differences between the candidates. "We are still a center-right country," says Winston. "And voters will still prefer a center-right candidate to a liberal one."

Data from that same *Washington Post*/ABC News poll support this claim. Although Democrats hold a strong advantage in party identification, more people consider themselves conservatives than liberals. The survey found that 38 percent of those polled thought of themselves as Democrats, 24 percent as Republicans, and 34 percent as independents. Only 21 percent of those polled thought of themselves as liberals, while 33 percent saw themselves as conservatives and 43 percent as moderates.

McCain, it seems, has to do two things at once to win. He has to motivate conservatives to support him (financially now and at the polls in November), and he has to woo independent voters away from a charismatic liberal. To that end, McCain might want to make this an issues election and run as a conservative, emphasizing issues—the war on terror, spending and government waste, tax reform, racial preferences, and gay marriage among them—on which large segments of independents and conservatives agree.

There are signs the McCain campaign is beginning to understand the importance of conservatives. In late June, McCain met with a group of pro-family conservatives in Ohio. And the previous week, he took a break from talking energy to pound Obama for his embrace of the Supreme Court's *Boumediene* decision—a decision voters opposed 5 to 1.

There is another reason to do this. As NBC News political director Chuck Todd pointed out last week, many of those who are now calling themselves independents are likely to be conservatives disappointed with the Republican party. So winning support from independents and conservatives may, in many cases, be the same thing. ♦

Very Retiring Republicans

They'd rather quit than fight.

BY FRED BARNES

Democrats John Conyers, John Dingell, and Charles Rangel were in the wilderness from 1994 to 2006, the years of Republican rule of the House of Representatives. They endured the shame of being in the minority. Then Democrats regained control of the House, and, at age 77, Conyers became chairman of the House Judiciary Committee. It was his second stint as committee chairman. Dingell got back the chairmanship of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, which he'd held earlier for 14 years. He was 80. And when Rangel became chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee last year, he was 76.

What kept them from retiring after 1994 was their expectation that Democrats would win back the House quickly (they were wrong about that). Now Republicans in the House have the opposite expectation. They believe the prospects of a Republican revival in the foreseeable future are exceedingly poor. So 30 of them, including some of the party's brightest stars, are retiring. Four have already quit, resigning rather than finishing out their final term.

This is a serious problem for Republicans in the 2008 election. The retirees have created an unusually large number of open Republican seats, exciting Democrats. Defeating incumbents is difficult, but open seats are easier for the opposition party to win. Here are the stories of four Republicans who are retiring.

The Dealmaker. Jim McCrery of Louisiana, the senior Republican on Ways and Means, came close to retiring in 2004. He rebuffed pleas by President Bush and Vice President Cheney that he run for reelection. But his wife, who lived with his two sons in their home in Shreveport, intervened. Knowing that his goal was to be Ways and Means chairman, she urged him to stay in Congress and said she and the boys would live in Washington. The result: They moved and he ran and won.

When Democrats took over after the 2006 election, McCrery, 57, figured he could still play a significant role on major issues like Social Security and tax reform and perhaps even Medicare. His strong relationship with Rangel, the new chairman, gave him encouragement. He spent four months in 2007 negotiating secretly with Rangel. "Charlie and I made some progress working together" on overhauling Social Security and the tax code, McCrery says. Then Rangel informed him that their efforts were for naught. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi had ruled out any compromise with Republicans on these issues.

That left McCrery with a minimal role and little hope of a larger one any time soon. "Prospects for the '08 election reversing the Democratic majority don't look particularly bright," he says. If he had to wait 12 years, as the Democrats did, he'd be 70 before his shot at the Ways and Means chairmanship—too long. "It just seemed like the right time [to retire]," he says. This time, after 20 years in Congress, he's not changing his mind.

The Uniter. Ray LaHood of Illinois says his favorite time in the House was when he co-chaired four "bipar-

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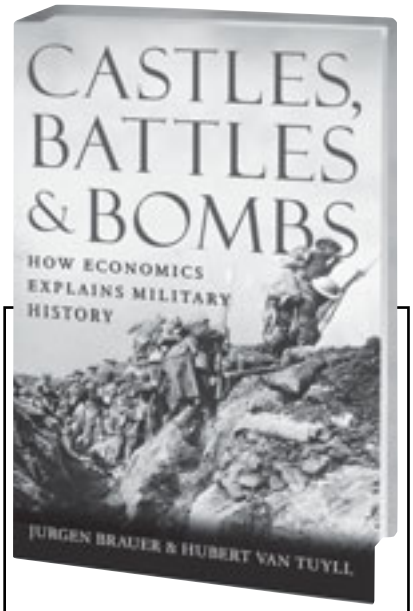

"My skepticism was relieved by the preface, my expectations enhanced by the first chapter, my confidence assured by the second. This study is serious, creative, important. As an economist I am happy to see economics so professionally applied to illuminate major decisions in the history of warfare."—**Thomas C. Schelling, winner of the 2005 Nobel Prize in Economics**

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tisan summits" that brought together Republican and Democratic House members, with their spouses and children, at a retreat outside Washington. The first in 1995 drew 200 members, 150 spouses, and 100 kids. "Those are the kinds of things where people develop relationships beyond Congress," he said.

The idea was to spur bipartisanship, which LaHood says is "the only way to get things done." But the last summit was held in 2001. LaHood and his Democratic co-chair tried to organize a fifth one in 2003, but "the sentiment to do a big retreat was not there."

LaHood's district is famous, having been represented by Abraham Lincoln, Everett Dirksen, and Bob Michel. His face became well known when he presided over the House impeachment of President Clinton. Elected in 1994, he says, "I don't like being in the minority. It's no fun." But that's not why he's leaving. "Frankly, I'm 62 and I want to get out of the rat race."

The House today, says Tom Davis, "is not a very nice place to be." He has three kids in college, "and two more years in the House is not going to help my marketability. If I'm going to leave, this is the right time, the time to do something else." So he'll take a private sector job. He calls it "a sabbatical."

The Pol. Tom Reynolds of New York is 57 and has been in elective office for 35 years. He was a member of the Republican class of 1998 and rose to become part of the House leadership and chairman of the campaign arm of the House Republicans. His misfortune was to have had the campaign post in 2006.

"I'm a conservative Republican in a moderate district in a liberal state," Reynolds says. And times have changed, especially in New York. Democrats might reapportion him out of a district in 2012 and, besides, "I never intended to serve in Congress in my 70s."

Reynolds was minority leader in the state assembly when he was talked into running for the House. "I ran for Congress to be in the majority, and I've enjoyed every single minute of it." But that's gone. To win the House again, Republicans will have to build up their party in New England, New York, and the Upper Midwest, Reynolds says. "We can do it, but I don't think it's a quick fix."

The Moderate. Tom Davis of Virginia is one of the smartest politicians in either party and a shrewd analyst of political trends. But his talents have been underappreciated by Virginia Republicans. He was ready to run for the open Virginia Senate seat this year and use a primary to build statewide recognition. But the party decided on a nominating convention to thwart him, and Davis, who had the best chance of keeping the seat for Republicans, bowed out.

Davis, 59, was also elected in 1994 and finds his first taste of minority status unappealing. The House today, he says, "is not a very nice place to be." He has three kids in college, he says, "and two more years in the House is not going to help my marketability. If I'm going to leave, this is the right time, the time to do something else." So he'll take a private sector job, probably in Washington. He calls it "a sabbatical."

Might these Republicans one day regret their decision to retire? McCrery muses about a failed Barack Obama presidency, pulled down by tax hikes and excessive spending and too many favors for organized labor. If that happens, Republicans could do as well in 2010 as they did in 1994. "If I thought I had a better than 50-50 chance of being chairman next year, I'd run," he says. But he's not running precisely because he doesn't think that. ♦

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McCain, Obama, & the Catholic Vote

Which one is a natural?

BY RYAN T. ANDERSON

While a number of Catholics have been waxing rhapsodic about Barack Obama's appeal, it seems to have gone unnoticed that John McCain is running on an astonishingly Catholic platform. Nearly every time he ventures off the conservative plantation, he moves in the direction of liberal Catholic politics. Could this translate into votes in the fall?

Despite the enthusiasm of his Catholic fans, Obama consistently ran behind Hillary Clinton among Catholic Democrats. Just 30 percent voted for him in Pennsylvania, for instance, even with the backing of the state's premier pro-life Democrat, Senator Bob Casey Jr. According to one of Obama's Catholic advisers, Notre Dame professor Cathy Kaveny, Obama "has been slowly but steadily gaining ground among Catholics, as they come to see who he is and what he stands for." She argues that many Catholic voters will respond "to his vision of the common good"—in particular "ending the unjust war in Iraq, providing decent jobs, ensuring affordable health care for all, and working for comprehensive immigration reform." Earlier this spring, Doug Kmiec, a pro-life Catholic who served under Reagan and George H.W. Bush and was a Romney adviser, said, "Sorry, McCain," but "Barack Obama is a natural for the Catholic vote."

Yet Obama's troubles winning actual Catholic voters in the Democratic primaries suggest he might have problems in the general election—unsurprising, perhaps, given what Nat Hentoff has described as Obama's "extremism" on the abortion issue. Obama has opposed every effort to protect unborn human life, including the Supreme Court's upholding of the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act.

While it's true that many in Rome opposed the invasion, the Church never declared the war unjust. Catholic soldiers serve in it, and Catholic politicians vote to fund the effort. More important, the current thinking of Rome is that a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq would be the height of moral irresponsibility.

Obama even voted against an anti-infanticide bill to protect the lives of babies who survive an abortion and are born alive. Though he claims to be against same-sex marriage, he announced that he "respects the decision of the California Supreme Court" decreeing same-sex marriage for that state. Meanwhile, his statements on the judiciary make it clear that his judges will not be in the mold of Roberts and Alito (he voted against both in their Senate confirmation hearings).

The contrast with McCain is stark. And yet McCain has had his own Catholic problems. Rick Santorum, the posterboy for conservative Catholic causes, argued during the primaries that McCain was no social conservative. Though Santorum later endorsed McCain ("With the exception of embryonic stem-cell funding, he always voted for life and stood for the culture of life"), there is still some nervousness among social-issues voters. McCain's widely reported speech on May 15, in which he laid out hopes for his first term, for example, contained no mention of abortion or marriage. But McCain has come out in favor of the California state marriage amendment, and the judges he'd appoint to the Supreme Court wouldn't impose same-sex marriage on the nation nor strike down restrictions on abortion.

If at the end of the day Obama and McCain more or less fit into the standard political alignments for the left and right on the standard social issues, where will the debate go on the new moral wedges? Consider the issues liberal Catholics have recently championed in opposition to conservative politicians: the war, torture, immigration, and the environment.

For Obama-supporting Catholics, the Iraq war is a huge wedge issue. "On the war and torture," Catholics United's Chris Korzen opined, "McCain is not on the side of Catholic theology." In the lead up to Pope Benedict XVI's visit to the United States, many liberal Catholics were predicting a big showdown in which Benedict would lecture Bush and urge him to withdraw American troops.

But this isn't the current thinking of the Church. While it's true that many in Rome opposed the invasion, the Church never declared the war unjust. Catholic soldiers serve in it, and Catholic politicians vote to fund the effort. More important, the current thinking of Rome is that a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq would be the height of moral irresponsibility. This may explain why liberal Catholics didn't get their hoped-for antiwar soundbite during the pope's recent visit. Catholics who argue that the Iraq war is unjust are living in 2003. On the question of what to do *now*, nothing in Catholic teaching suggests

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that Obama's plan to pull out is morally compelling.

The questions of support for the war, the troops, and patriotism may well end up cutting in McCain's favor, not Obama's. Though American Catholics are committed to a universal church that teaches universal values, they also remain remarkably committed to their nation; patriotism and support for national service run high. This might explain part of the Pennsylvania result: Blue-collar Catholic Democrats didn't warm up to the perceived elitism of Barack Obama or the anti-Americanism of Jeremiah Wright, his then-pastor.

If Iraq doesn't work as a Catholic wedge, what about other issues? Here, McCain's defections from talk-radio conservatism are in directions that should be appealing to liberal Catholics. McCain is an outspoken opponent of torture, including waterboarding. He called for comprehensive immigration reform in terms strikingly aligned with the U.S. Catholic bishops' recommendations. This could appeal to Hispanic Catholics, especially when combined with his pro-life views and his support for the California marriage amendment. And McCain has long been beating the drums for a response to global warming.

Regardless of the merits of McCain's positions on these issues—and they have certainly angered many conservatives—they make awkward many of the talking points favored by left-leaning religious commentators. If the war, torture, immigration, and climate change are the pressing moral issues of the day, will they be able to attack McCain?

Well, yes, they can—but it will be more difficult. And of course, this leaves aside poverty, education, health care, and a host of other domestic social welfare programs. Kaveny has argued that Catholics would warm to Obama for "providing decent jobs" and "ensuring affordable health care for all." But the truth is that Obama and McCain have not brought much that is new to the perennial debate about the role of the state and the market in best serving the common good, particularly the poor. Both argue that their policies are intended to help the downtrodden, and it would be a low charge to claim that either is disingenuous on this score.

The Catholic church doesn't claim to have the expertise to answer the largely technical question of how best to achieve such ends as remediating poverty and providing health care. But judging by the moral standards articulated in Pope John Paul II's social teaching encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, one could make the case that McCain's proposals are more consistent than Obama's with the Catholic social ideals of subsidiarity, solidarity, and human dignity.

Of course, Catholic teaching and Catholic voting do not always go hand in hand. Conservative Catholics will continue to attack Obama on abortion, embryo destruction, cloning, same-sex marriage, and the judiciary—while liberal Catholics will continue to attack McCain on the war, torture, immigration, and climate change. Against such attacks, McCain appears to have a defense. Does Obama? ♦

History's Fall Guys

From tulips to $4 gas, "speculators" are always to blame. BY DEAN BARNETT

There was a moment in history when the Dutch really loved their tulips. In 1635, 40 tulip bulbs sold for the astronomical price of 100,000 *florins*. This was at a time when the average yearly income of a Dutchman who wasn't forced to spend all his time plugging leaky dikes was 150 *florins*.

Eventually, the Dutch came to their senses and collectively realized the uselessness of the tulip. You couldn't cook on it, you couldn't fuel your horse-drawn buggy with it, and you couldn't eat it (although according to legend, a sailor mistook a tulip bulb for an onion and munched away—the owner of the precious bulb saw to it that the sailor spent months in jail). So deep was the passion for the bulb, however, that a speculating class of investors managed to shove the Dutch economy into a depression.

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This seminal economic event happened over three centuries ago. Ever since then, "speculation" and "speculator" have been pejorative terms, used to belittle certain classes of investors that have fallen into public disfavor. Otherwise respectable people often use the term "speculator" the way someone like Pat Buchanan might use the phrase "New York money men."

Right now, Americans' economic anxiety is reaching feverish levels. The primary culprit for the nation's heebie-jeebies is the record price of fuel. At such times, the political and chattering classes share a vital responsibility—they must identify a villain. Inevitably, they have settled on "speculators" as their bogeyman.

The terminology can be a bit confusing to those not steeped in the arts of demagoguery. For instance, in recent years, lots of people bought homes that they quite simply couldn't afford. They assumed (mistakenly or naively) that the

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homes they purchased would be worth more the following year. In other words, they were speculating. But the political class does not call such people "speculators." Instead, it reserves for these purported victims the more benign sobriquet of "homeowners" and debates how much taxpayer-funded largesse should be lavished on them to ease the pain of their unwise speculation.

But how about people who think oil will be worth more next year—do we call them petroleum owners? No, politicians and pundits have dubbed them "speculators." They seem to think that speculators are purchasing oil and hoarding it, readying to sell it when prices have reached truly astronomical levels. In this fanciful scenario, the speculators are decreasing the world's oil supply via their rapacious hoarding, and the diminished supply is providing a spike in prices.

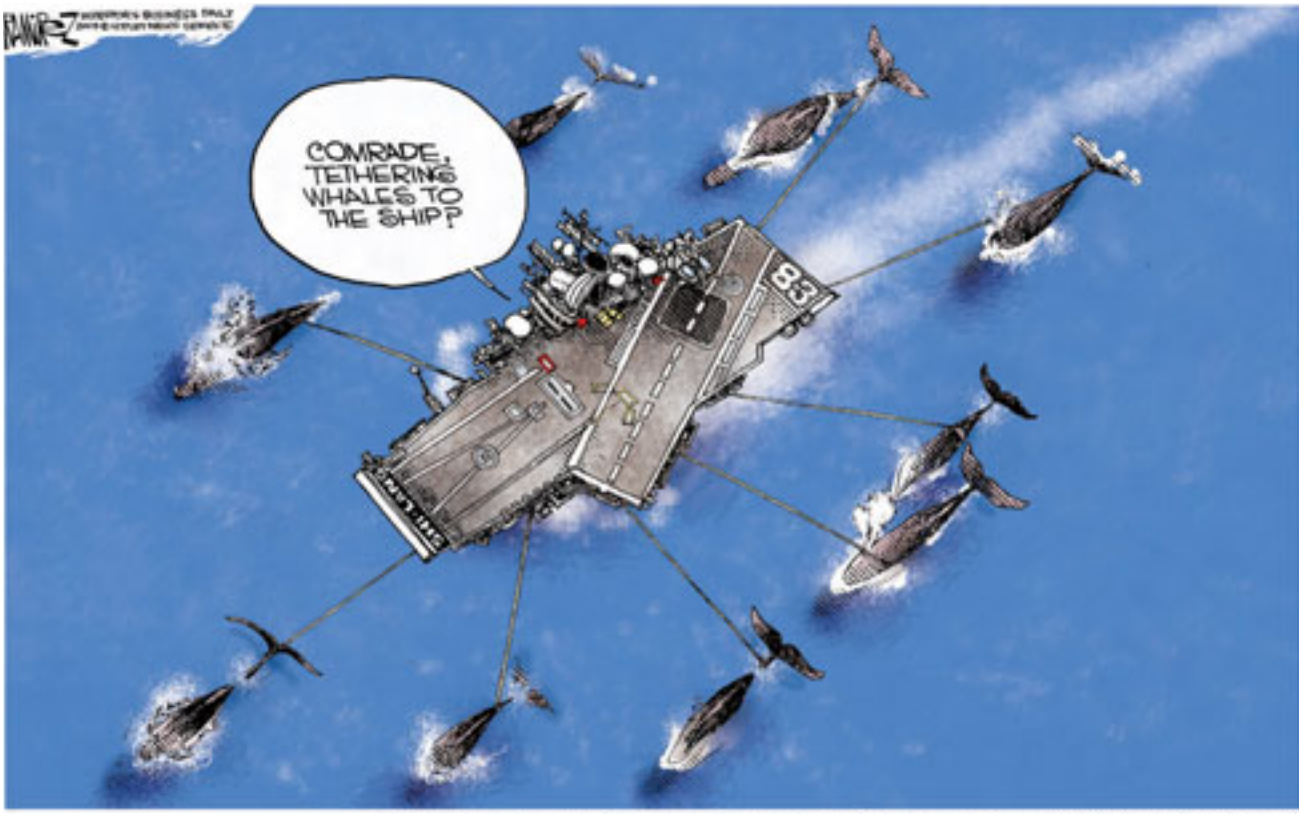
This scenario calls to mind the Hunt Brothers' infamous attempt to corner the world's silver market in 1979. Over a nine-month period, the Hunts purchased and hoarded somewhere between $2 billion and $4 billion worth of silver. Whether they twirled their mustaches while doing so is unclear. Regardless, the price of silver between September 1979 and January 1980 leapt from $11 to $50 per ounce. Unfortunately for the Hunts, the crash of Silver Thursday in March 1980 brought the whole scheme tumbling down. Fortunately for the Hunts, the American government banned them from any future commodities trading so they could do themselves no further harm.

Disappointingly for villain-seeking politicians, the Hunt Brothers' scenario bears no resemblance to what's currently going on with the oil market. There are no mustache-twirling speculators hoarding the world's oil supplies and in the process artificially inflating oil prices. Instead, the world economy has been making great strides—especially in petroleum-thirsty China and India—and oil supplies haven't kept pace.

Given the media and government-directed hostility toward "speculators," many people will want proof that they are innocent. Well, for the scapegoat-seeking masses, there's the following inconvenient truth: If oil were being withheld from the market by speculators, said oil would physically have to be somewhere other than on the open market where it is being sold and bought. And yet crude inventories have remained roughly constant since 1998. If someone were hoarding oil, we would have seen a spike in crude inventories.

In fact, speculators, also known as investors and traders, play a salubrious role in the market for oil, as they do in other markets. In a paper released last week on the present crisis, the Institute for Energy Research outlined the way investors, both buyers and sellers, increase the oil markets' stability:

The benefit of [the investment] pro-



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cess is that it provides *liquidity* to the futures markets. For example, the engineers at an oil refinery may report to management that routine maintenance is taking longer than expected, and consequently capacity over the next few months will be slightly lower than originally forecasted. The refinery will then need to sell off some of the oil futures contracts it had purchased, because it doesn't want to take delivery of barrels that it will need to hold as inventory for an extra few months.

Without institutional investors to "pick up the slack," the refinery would have to find another physical consumer willing to buy the futures contracts at the exact moment when the refinery wished to sell them, or it would have to sell small quantities of contracts to various physical consumers. Rather than engaging in this costly and time-consuming search process, the refinery can sell the entire batch of contracts at a reasonable price to institutional investors who act as middlemen.

I know what you're thinking, especially if you're a United States congressman or senator: If we can't scapegoat "speculators" for $4 a gallon gas, who can we blame? For those who really need to find a villain in this affair, there is good news and bad news. The bad news is that one of the principal causes of high gas prices will be familiar to anyone who took an introductory economics class—supply is relatively low (not to mention relatively inelastic), while demand is relatively high. That means higher prices.

But blaming the whole thing on Adam Smith's invisible hand obviously serves no political purpose. That brings us to the good news for the politicians in the audience—the other principal cause of $4 a gallon gas is the weak dollar. Because how the dollar gets strong or weak is understood even more poorly than what "speculators" do, a crafty politician can blame pretty much anyone he wants.

I'm fairly sure I can already hear Pat Buchanan resting the blame for the weak dollar at the feet of "New York money men." ♦

Apartments in Dujiangyan: Residents have derided the concrete as 'tofu.'

Shaken and Stirred Up

The aftermath of China's earthquake.

BY REUBEN F. JOHNSON

Dujiangyan City, Sichuan Province

Chinese superstition revolves around the magic of certain numbers, with 8 being a good luck number. Procuring mobile phone numbers or land lines with multiple "8s" in them can cost hundreds or thousands of dollars. Perhaps not surprisingly, the opening of the Beijing Olympic Games will be on August 8—the eighth day of the eighth month of the eighth year of the new millennium (with ceremonies commencing at 8:08 P.M., local time).

So it has not gone unnoticed as a piece of cruel fate that the devastating Sichuan Province earthquake occurred a (supposedly) magical 88 days before the games. To add insult to injury, as a colleague's wife reminded me over dinner in a Chengdu restaurant, "if you add up the digits of the day and month of the earthquake—12 May (1+2+5)—you again get the number eight."

Despite these devastating portents, the people have pulled together to try and rebuild. But a backlash is brewing in the demands for accountability by parents of the thousands of children who died when schools collapsed during the quake. Shoddy construction that did not conform to building codes is why, they have charged, and they want to know who is responsible.

The Great Sichuan earthquake has officially been measured by China's Seismological Bureau as a magnitude 8 (another ill omen). The quake's epicenter was 50 miles northwest of Chengdu, the provincial capital, at a depth of 12 miles. One of the excuses made by local authorities in the province is that

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the building code calls for structures to be survivable only up to a 7 magnitude quake, so they cannot be held accountable for Mother Nature's having exceeded their code.

"Not good enough," is what the parents say. They have derided the building materials in the schools that collapsed as "tofu" instead of concrete. China's National Bureau of Corruption Prevention has promised to investigate allegations of bribery in the building of the schools, but no one is holding his breath waiting on the findings. Engineers examining the ruins and the parents of students killed have pointed to a lack of steel reinforcement in the concrete, and externally flamboyant designs at the expense of robust structures. These are all telltale signs that building funds ended up in someone's pocket.

Local officials were at first happy to thrust these grieving parents into the limelight to play on the world's sympathies (and secure as much aid as possible for rescue and rebuilding efforts). Now they are trying to avoid the prying eyes of the outside world and keep reporters from seeing or speaking to these same parents. Reporters from AP and other foreign news organizations were barred from a meeting between these parents and local government offices. The parents wanted the reporters in the meeting. The local government, backed up by a substantial police presence, won the argument, with correspondents being forcibly removed and detained.

Perhaps not coincidentally, 12 of these local officials were subsequently fired for dereliction of duty and misuse of earthquake relief funds. Chinese supervision minister Ma Wen stated that her department had received 1,178 complaints about the official response to the quake. Administrative sanctions were levied against 43 officials, including the 12 fired.

"Quite a number of the reports exposed the misuse of tents, food, and other relief supplies," she said. The hammer is being brought down by the central government in a not-so-subtle message to the local population: We are the "good guys"—bringing in the army and all other possible resources to help—and we are going to root out the "bad guys" in the local administration who created this problem.

Refugee camp (top) and parents and relatives of pupils killed in the May 12 quake.

AFP / GETTY IMAGES ; GETTY IMAGES

This Beijing good/local politicians bad message may or may not resonate in Dujiangyan, the city closest to the epicenter of the quake—where three of the largest schools collapsed. Tens of thousands are now living in tent cities, their homes gone. Hundreds of heavily damaged, deserted buildings look like the aftermath of a nuclear war. From the street you can see family artwork still mounted on evacuated apartment walls.

"We will be in these tents at least three months and then in temporary housing for at least three years after that," I was told. On the day I visited the city the mosquitoes were miserable and the humidity worse. Young boys were scavenging the rubble of collapsed buildings looking for scrap metal to sell. Banners exhort the residents to "kill any rats you see to prevent spread of disease" and to "maintain good sanitation."

Rebuilding in this province could take the better part of a decade. The question is whether the local population will tolerate a long period of living in squalid conditions—their children still buried under rubble—without being stirred into more open rebellion against the local provincial government that they increasingly hold responsible for their misery. ♦

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Laughter at the Supreme Court

Yes, the justices tell lawyer jokes.

BY LEE ROSS

"Attempts at humor usually fall flat." This concise admonition from the official guide for lawyers arguing before the Supreme Court makes clear that jokes are not the prescribed oratorical device for winning cases. This guidance, however, does not extend to the nine justices, who quite liberally inject levity from the bench. In fact, in the 70 cases heard by the Court during the 2007-08 term, the notation "(Laughter.)" appears 187 times in official Court transcripts. Justice Antonin Scalia: "I wish you had said that in your brief because we could have saved ourselves a lot of reading. (Laughter.)"

The justices are not using the oral arguments as auditions for a guest appearance on David Letterman. Their humor is generally dry and appropriate for the high-intensity atmosphere of the nation's highest court. A frequent target is the legal profession. Yes, the justices of the Supreme Court tell lawyer jokes! Justice Anthony Kennedy: "There are all kinds of nuts who could get 90 percent on the bar exam. (Laughter.)" Justice Scalia: "Cannot communicate coherently? I sometimes—I sometimes think that the lawyers cannot communicate coherently. (Laughter.)"

Several times this term the Court heard cases involving politics. A subject that every Supreme Court justice knows as well as a late-night comic will lend itself to wry observations.

> Mr. White: The Libertarians require you to sign a membership application that they oppose the use of force in the resolution of political disputes.
>
> Chief Justice John Roberts: Libertarians have a lot more rules than the other parties. (Laughter.)

Or:

> Justice David Souter: [D]o you know any people who go around saying, well, you know, I really prefer the Democrats; I'm a Republican myself? I mean that, that doesn't happen.
>
> Mr. McKenna: Well, the example of Senator Lieberman comes to mind, where he said I really prefer the Democrats and I'm running as an independent. (Laughter.)
>
> Justice Souter: There's always one.

That last is a rare instance of a lawyer, contrary to the Court's strong suggestion, using humor to support a point—generally only when a lawyer is engaged by a justice who opens the door for a witty response. "The unheralded role of the oral advocate is to play straight man for the justice," observes recently departed Solicitor General Paul Clement, who has argued 49 cases before the court. He says a lawyer can't go wrong by keeping humor out of the oral argument and advises against it for any lawyer making his or her first appearance before the Court.

Often the justices tell "jokes" that few outside the courtroom can appreciate: inside baseball variety observations that make for comic relief for a very select audience. Justice Souter: "As a dissenter in *Carbone*, I naturally do not find that the worst answer you could give. (Laughter.)" Justice Samuel Alito: "Well, as a dissenter in *United Haulers*, I also don't think it's a good distinction. (Laughter.)"

No lawyer wants to hear a barb pointed at him (or fail to laugh at the jokes of a justice weighing his argument), yet multiple times throughout the term, justices did just that. It is unlikely that any law school moot court prepares lawyers for this kind of barrage:

> Justice Kennedy: I think the reason you hesitated to answer yes might be inconsistent with your position. (Laughter.)

Or:

> Justice Stephen Breyer: That is not an answer. (Laughter.) I would appreciate an answer to the question.

Or:

> Justice Souter: How about "yes" or "no"? (Laughter.)

There is no question that Scalia outshines the rest in courtroom jocularity. "That is who he is. He's not trying to perform," says former Scalia clerk and George Washington University law professor John Duffy. "He knows that in order to engage people and to be understood sometimes humor makes the point clearly. I learned from him that there is power in the way you convey thoughts."

Scalia's humor tends to come out during the extended questioning of a lawyer. While it may be difficult to predict the timing of his humor, there are certain issues sure to draw his ire in a way that only he can express.

> That's extraordinary. I don't know of any tax that a State could possibly impose, that no State has imposed. (Laughter.)
>
> I don't think Congress had the slightest idea. (Laughter.)
>
> Do you think we should trust our incumbent senators and representatives to level the playing field for us? (Laughter.)
>
> What if some—one candidate is more eloquent than the other one? You make him talk with pebbles in his mouth or what? (Laughter.)
>
> Are there any psychiatric studies that show how accurate psychiatric studies are? (Laughter.)

It would be folly to suggest that Scalia is not serious about his work. It's just that humor is a part of his being,

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and it clearly comes across in the courtroom. "It's [a part of] life and he wants to enjoy life. He enjoys his job and takes pleasure in what he does," says Duffy. Clement, who also clerked for Scalia, says that when "you interact with Justice Scalia in any format—as a clerk, at a cocktail party, or speaking extemporaneously to student groups—he's somebody who has a good sense of humor and can tell a good joke."

Scalia is not the Court's only jester; other justices toss out their own droll perspectives on certain matters. Clement particularly cites Justice Breyer's use of humorous or even fantastical hypothetical examples to make his point, though sometimes Breyer himself loses track of where he's going:

> You're saying that this is unreasonable, and that really is my question because I'd like you to assume two things with me, which you probably don't agree with, and I may not agree with them, either. (Laughter.)

And:

> Well, I'm not totally certain what I'm talking about either. So we could go on. (Laughter.)

Only one time during the past term did Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg say anything that produced (Laughter.). She firmly maintains a no-nonsense approach to asking questions. Justice Clarence Thomas said nothing humorous during the term because he said nothing at all during the time. Despite his notorious aversion to asking questions during oral arguments, he is often seen actively engaged in side discussions with Justice Breyer, who sits to his right. And sometimes they can be seen sharing a hearty albeit muted laugh. Those who know Thomas say his personality shines through when he is out of the public eye. "He has a rather rich sense of humor. And often uses it at his own expense," says former Thomas clerk and Kansas University professor Stephen McAllister. "He has a remarkably deep, almost belly laugh. It is the kind of laugh that roars across the room."

It is fair to say that the justices probably don't enter the courtroom with the express purpose of cracking jokes. But it does seem that Justice John Paul Stevens had his final question planned for the end of an argument that included considerable discussion of a decision the Court made in 1990.

> Justice Stevens: One last question: We disagreed on parts of the *Irwin* opinion, but I take it you would agree with me that the government was particularly well represented in that case, wouldn't you? (Laughter.)
>
> Mr. Stewart: The government could not have been better represented, Your Honor. (Laughter.)
>
> Chief Justice Roberts: It is hard to understand how they could have lost the case. (Laughter.)

The reason for all of that laughter? Roberts was the government lawyer who argued and lost that case 18 years ago. ♦

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L'Affaire Enderlin

Being a French journalist means never having to say you're sorry

By Anne-Elisabeth Moutet

Paris

To understand the al-Dura affair, it helps to keep one thing in mind: In France, you can't own up to a mistake. This is a country where the law of the Circus Maximus still applies: *Vae victis*, Woe to the vanquished. Slip, and it's thumbs-down. Not for nothing was Brennus a Gaul. His modern French heirs don't do apologies well, or at all if they can possibly help it. Why should they? That would be an admission of weakness. Blink, and you become the fall guy.

So, in the case of Muhammad al-Dura—a 12-year-old Palestinian boy allegedly killed by Israeli fire during a skirmish in the Gaza strip on September 30, 2000—it was not really to be expected that the journalist who released the 59-second news report, Charles Enderlin, longtime Jerusalem correspondent for France 2 TV, would immediately admit having hastily slapped together sensational footage supplied by the channel's regular Palestinian stringer, and not checked whose bullets had, in fact, killed, or perhaps even not killed, the boy.

In the ensuing eight years, the small figure of Muhammad al-Dura cowering beside his crouching father became the defining image of the second Intifada. The "child martyr's" picture cropped up on posters, websites, postage stamps, and street names throughout the Muslim world from Mali to Indonesia, fueling lynchings and suicide bombings. The Israeli authorities at first took the French report more or less at face value and blandly deplored the child's death in a hasty release ("To the best of our knowledge, the boy was hit by our fire"). Others, however, were not so sure.

They parsed and scoured each of the 59 seconds of the film and every corner of the location for clues, ballistic angles, improbable moves, and hidden motivations. The film showed the two figures first seeking cover from gunfire, then later slumped over, though with no sign of blood or wounds. When increasingly convincing voices came to question, at the very least, the point of origin of the shots—the location of the small Israeli garrison made it pretty much impossible for Muhammad and his father, who was allegedly wounded, to have been hit by Israeli bullets—it took six weeks for the Israeli army spokesman to state in an interview that "both versions of the incident [are] possible," and two more months for an official investigation to be launched.

Meanwhile, Enderlin and his bosses at the state-run France 2, who had distributed their news item free worldwide, were refusing to answer questions. They flatly declined to provide the complete 27 minutes of footage taken that afternoon by the cameraman, or to concede any possible error, ping-ponging in the classical obfuscating pattern of bureaucracies everywhere. ("It's not the crime, it's the cover-up" hasn't yet made it to France.) It took two years for Enderlin to give his first interview, to a friendly colleague, Elisabeth Schemla, the respected editor of the *Proche-Orient.info* website and a former *L'Express* associate editor, in the course of which he confused "protecting one's sources" with not providing the tape. (Personal disclosure: I was at the time deputy editor of *Proche-Orient.info*.)

Even an hour-long documentary produced in 2002 by the award-winning German broadcaster Esther Schapira, who works for German state television's First Channel, failed to make a dent in the stance of France 2. While purposely keeping away from more controversial theories, Schapira's work comprehensively put paid to the "Israeli bullets killed Muhammad al-Dura" theory. Asked by Schemla why French television would not broadcast Schapira's film, Enderlin stonewalled: "I don't decide what the channel runs. I have bosses, there are people above me in charge . . . a professional hierarchy."

Having dug in his heels in time-honored fashion, Enderlin, a seasoned journalist and a French-Israeli dual national who'd spent most of his adult life at the same job, never imagined the al-Dura story would dog him. He was covered by his superiors in the hierarchy, affording him the Zen-like serenity achievable in large

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French organizations, which are profoundly top-down and basically unchanged in spirit since the court of the Sun King. His coverage of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, while regularly criticized by pro-Israeli groups, was highly esteemed by his peers. He had produced a well-informed documentary series on the Oslo Accords, the peace process, and the 2000 Camp David talks, tied to a book that has been published in English; and, while it could be argued that he was perhaps too close to some of his sources (several of the parties to the peace talks actually held discussions at the France 2 bureau, loaned by a helpful Enderlin as discreet neutral ground), this was a notable achievement. Such a person could not, in the order of things, be seriously threatened by a bunch of activists or scruffy bloggers behind their computer screens questioning his professional judgment. When he dismissed accusations of a cover-up by explaining that he had chosen "not to show the full footage of the child's agony," which would have been "unbearable," he fully expected to be taken on trust.

Yet the bloggers and the activists refused to let the story die. In fact the unlikely alliance of, among others, a professor of medieval history from Boston University, a hot-headed former financial executive, and a former *Le Monde* reporter soon brought to light practices that would surprise no journalist with experience working in a totalitarian state. Most foreign correspondents covering the Palestinian territories from Israel rely on local stringers, cameramen, fixers. These Palestinian nationals do not benefit from the protections routinely granted international journalists. They and their families can be subjected to all sorts of pressures by a system not known for its respect for human rights and free speech niceties. The staging of scenes for the benefit of photographers is common.

The medieval history professor, Richard Landes, a soft-spoken American who spent his childhood in France and got his early education in a Paris public school, now one of the case's most devoted parsers, coined a word for Palestinian manipulation of the media: "Pallywood." He believes the whole al-Dura incident was staged. Using footage taken by other cameramen on the scene that day, he argues his case forcefully on two well-visited and regularly updated websites (theaugeanstables.com and second-draft.org) as well as in countless articles and interviews.

Enter the hothead. Philippe Karsenty is a French Jew who felt so let down by the mainstream coverage of the second Intifada and the Middle East in general that he gave up a successful career in finance to start a media monitoring agency. His Media Ratings (web

Three stills from the France 2 footage, September 30, 2000

Muhammad al-Dura and his father, Gaza

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address *m-r.fr*) challenges the validity of press stories on all subjects with a test he dubs "the P.H.I.L.T.R.E method," rating articles for "accuracy, consistency, independence, freedom, transparency, accountability, and exhaustiveness." Karsenty took up the al-Dura case and started firing away at everyone he saw as responsible for perpetrating a dangerous lie.

Karsenty is a boyish character in his early 40s with rapid-fire delivery, a serious cell-phone habit, and an unflagging, self-appointed sense of mission. He makes enemies among his friends with as much gusto as he takes on the French establishment. (There is something of the neighborhood kid ringing all the doorbells on the block about him.) He has attacked various French Jewish leaders as well as France 2's news director, Arlette Chabot; Enderlin; France 2's chairman, Patrick de Carolis; and a slew of politicians. He routinely uses expressions such as "I will bury him!" and "I will end that conniving bastard's career!" He is a bit mad, but it can be argued that many saints and heroes were a bit mad—if Joan of Arc had been happier in her Lorraine village, we Parisians might all be speaking English.

Karsenty is no saint, but it was his peculiar blend of bravado, doggedness, testosterone, and plain bad manners that eventually caused France 2 to blink. (I was reminded, meeting him, of the former New York senator Alfonse D'Amato, who gloried in his "Brooklyn Rottweiler" nickname and was turned loose by the Senate Banking Committee on Swiss banks that refused to reveal the number and balances of their Holocaust victims' accounts. Until then, the Swiss had only been confronted with polite delegations headed by the suave likes of Paul Volcker, the former Fed chairman, and Stuart Eizenstat, the former undersecretary of state. They had gotten nowhere. D'Amato, taking no prisoners, unlocked the process in a couple of months.)

At any rate, two years ago, after one Karsenty op-ed too many about the "arrant hoax" of the al-Dura affair, France 2 sued him for libel. In a country where judges are civil servants, their first ruling surprised few observers: They ruled for the national institution, France 2, and ordered the outsider, Karsenty, to pay one euro in damages to the plaintiffs, a fine of 1,000 euros, and another 3,000 euros in costs. Even accounting for France's relatively moderate legal rates, this was a slap on the wrist. Taking a gamble, Karsenty appealed.

The appeals court convened last month and asked for—gasp—evidence, namely the famous 27-minute France 2 unedited master footage, which not even Enderlin had seen when he filed his item for the evening news. (His Palestinian cameraman, Talal Abu Rahmeh, had sent him by remote link about 6 minutes from which to make the news segment.) France 2, dragging its feet, eventually produced 18 minutes of film. (There is practically no such thing as "contempt of court" in such circumstances in the French judicial system.) The showing of this film made for an eerie moment at the trial, when the hitherto blasé judges sat up and started watching with more attention, then took a recess, after which they asked for all of France 2's footage. It would prove to be the turning point in the proceeding.

Karsenty came to court loaded for bear, with trolleyfuls of documentation, including a 90-page ballistics report. Out of it all, the court also trained its sights on a telling 2005 *Le Figaro* opinion piece by two establishment journalists, Denis Jeambar, then editor in chief of *L'Express* (France's answer to *Newsweek*), and Daniel Leconte, head of news documentaries at the state-run French-German cultural channel, Arte (a kind of French-German PBS), both unlikely participants in this undignified scrum. Jeambar and Leconte, egged on by a former *Le Monde* journalist, Luc Rosenzweig, who had taken a great interest in the case and started writing about it for the small Israeli news outfit Mena, asked France 2 as early as 2004 to show them the original raw rushes. Acknowledging Jeambar and Leconte's weight in the French establishment, France 2 had done for them what it had refused to do for countless others and had shown them, and Rosenzweig, the 27 minutes of film.

What happened then was typical of the cat-on-a-hot-tin-roof behavior even powerful French figures display when faced with any kind of violation of the unspoken but well-understood order of precedence obtaining among the elite here. While Jeambar and Leconte took their time to ponder what they'd seen, Rosenzweig had the nerve to file a piece for Mena describing the tape's scenes of staging just before the fatal shooting. You could see Palestinians being carried on stretchers into ambulances, then coming out again unharmed, all in a kind of carnival atmosphere, with kids throwing stones and making faces at the camera, despite what was supposed to be a tense situation. The tape showed occasional gunshots, not continuous firing. From the general horsing around captured on film by Abu Rahmeh, Mena concluded that the whole scene must have been staged.

Their being preempted by Rosenzweig incensed Leconte and Jeambar, who expressed their displeasure in the 2005 op-ed in the center-right *Le Figaro*. They spent so much of the piece denouncing Rosenzweig, his gall in reporting first on what he'd seen in the company of his betters, and the conclusions he'd dared draw independently, that it was easy to overlook a key fact: Jeambar and Leconte themselves not only conceded that the tape showed Palestinians stage-managing various shots

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and horsing around, they also described joking about those very scenes with the France 2 executives who were screening the tape for them.

All of those present at the screening—illustrious visitors and France 2 executives alike, the op-ed recounted—had ended up in full agreement that it was impossible to determine where the bullets had come from, but that it was highly unlikely that they could have come from the Israeli garrison. More crucially, Jeambar and Leconte also had caught Enderlin lying (or, as they kindly put it, "extrapolating"): "There was no 'unbearable agony' of the child anywhere on the tape," they wrote. "It wasn't edited out, it simply did not exist."

The *Figaro* piece had little impact when it was published, but it turned out to be one of the crucial elements in Karsenty's challenge to France 2's version of events. He won his appeal. The ruling, handed down on May 21, stated that he had acted in good faith as a media commentator and that he had presented a "coherent body of evidence," although the hoax could not be definitively proven. The judge also noted "inexplicable inconsistencies and contradictions in the explanations by Charles Enderlin," whose appearance in court was his first sworn testimony in the matter.

You might think Enderlin's professional standing would have been damaged by all this. You would be wrong. In less than a week, a petition was whipped up by his friends at *Le Nouvel Observateur*, France's premier left-wing newsweekly. The petition conceded no gray areas, no hint of doubt. It called Karsenty's vehemently argued but exhaustively documented stance a "seven-year hate-filled smear campaign" aimed at destroying Enderlin's "professional dignity." It flatly stated in the opening paragraph that Muhammad al-Dura was killed "by shots coming from the Israeli position." It expressed rank astonishment at a legal ruling "granting equal credibility to a journalist renowned for his rigorous work, and to willful deniers ignorant of the local realities and with no journalistic experience." It professed concern about a jurisprudence that would—shock! horror!—allow "anyone, in the name of good faith and of a supposed right to criticize and so-called freedom of speech, to smear with impunity the honor and the reputation of news professionals."

There followed the names of over 300 journalists—sorry, "news professionals"—and hundreds more miscellaneous celebrity intellectuals (under the heading "*Personalités*"), as well as a vast slew of mere web surfers ("*Internautes*"). Note, here again, that while the journalists were listed in apparently neutral alphabetical order, the managing editor of a provincial news conglomerate cheek by jowl with a lowly travel magazine stringer—the key distinction between pros and outsiders was maintained. It was as if the eight-year controversy had been irrelevant. From "news professionals," who were viewed as right by definition, no accountability could possibly be required. The guild was closing ranks.

You might think Enderlin's professional standing would have been damaged by all this. You would be wrong. In less than a week of the court's ruling against France 2, a petition backing him unequivocally was whipped up by his friends at *Le Nouvel Observateur*, France's premier left-wing newsweekly.

Above, Charles Enderlin in his Jerusalem office

RICKI ROSEN / CORBIS

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Scanning the long list (to which new signatures are added daily at the *Nouvel Obs* website), I experienced a kind of life-flashing-before-my-eyes moment. There were the names of people from every magazine or newspaper I'd ever worked at; people I'd trained with; people I'd been great pals with before life packed us off in different directions; and people I'd last seen only the week before. It was, to tell the truth, Stepford-like scary.

The petition conceded no gray areas, no hint of doubt. It called Karsenty's vehemently argued but exhaustively documented stance a "seven-year hate-filled smear campaign" aimed at destroying Enderlin's "professional dignity."

Philippe Karsenty

I resolved to call as many of the familiar names as I could. I knew, or thought I knew, where these people came from. Why had they signed? It might be awkward to ask, I reasoned, but wasn't it our business to ask questions?

As it turned out, it was plenty awkward. I came to recognize the moment when, after the "voice-from-your-past" greetings and the "where-are-you-now" fat-chewing and the nostalgic memories of past editors, colleagues, competitors, copy-takers ("all done by computer now, nobody to tell you you're not making sense!"), I got around to the subject at hand. As I started explaining that I was writing a piece on the al-Dura affair and was wondering why they had signed the petition, I learned to recognize the telltale pause, the "Good Lord, she's caught Scientology! She's gone over to the crazies!" moment, after which the whole object of the exercise would become to hang up on me as fast as possible.

There were those, like a foreign editor at a liberal magazine with whom I'd spent boozy evenings bemoaning the failings of our respective boyfriends 25 years ago, who now brushed me off like an inconvenience. "Haven't got time, too many pages to edit, staffer off sick, really, why do you ask such questions, have a catastrophic week, can't really talk to you until . . . well, Friday, but you will have filed by Friday, right?"

"Oh, no, there'll still be time on Friday." (Palpable disappointment on the line.) I did call the following Friday—I only got past her voicemail by reprogramming my cell phone not to send out my caller ID—and got an angry hiss in answer to my greeting. "I'm in an interview, can't talk, have nothing to say"—*click*.

There was the noted Paris-based former *Washington Post* foreign correspondent, 75-year-old Jon Randal, a Middle East expert I'd looked up to for years as a cub reporter, who trenchantly explained that he was seeing in all this a dangerous American trend of "vindictive pressure groups interfering with news organizations," now unfortunately crossing the Atlantic. (Having lived in Paris for over 40 years, Jon had become alarmingly French.)

"Americans have been under the gun of such people for some time, but France used to be free of this kind of thing. [These groups] are paranoid, they're persistent, they never give up, they sap the energy of good reporters. I can't imagine how much money France 2 has spent defending this case. Charles Enderlin is an excellent journalist! I don't care if it's the Virgin Birth affair, I would tend to believe him. Someone like Charles simply doesn't make a story up."

But, I tried to interject, the absence of the boy's "agony" from the tape?—

"Nonsense! Televisions don't show extreme violence. You know that. Look, I don't know what side you're on in this?"

"I'm trying to make sense of it all."

"I want you to call my friend at NPR, Loren Jenkins; call David Greenway at the *Boston Globe*; they'll tell you about pressure groups."

That was a different story; I had no time left and didn't call.

Similarly, there was the seasoned reporter from *Le Figaro* who thought Charles Enderlin, quite simply, was the best reporter operating in the Near East today. "These people, the ones attacking him, they're extreme rightists, yes? You

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can't take anything they say seriously." I conceded that the hoax wasn't proven, but that the shots had in all likelihood come from the Palestinian side. Esther Schapira . . . There was a sniff. "*Pas très sérieuse, non*?"

"Well, actually," I said, Schapira had just received the 2007 Europa Prize for her documentary on the murder of Theo van Gogh and been nominated for the 2008 Banff Television Awards. There was a small noise of well-bred surprise. All the same, nothing he'd heard until now had remotely convinced him or was likely to change his mind.

Then there was someone who insisted so vehemently on not being quoted or described in any way that I won't even reveal this person's sex. "Look, this whole thing has been a nightmare for Charles. He's received hate mail, his wife has been threatened, he's about to have a nervous breakdown. You want the truth? I don't give a flying monkey about the case. I signed for Charles. In all honesty, I think he edited his film on deadline and was careless, and afterwards he didn't want to admit he'd screwed up. A one-minute film, and it snowballed from there. Don't put in anything that might identify me, I don't want him to think I don't believe 100 percent in what he says, he'd be devastated."

This, at least, was bluntly honest. Jean-Yves Camus, the political scientist and expert on radical Islam, with whom I'd worked at *Proche-Orient.info*, was another unrepentant signatory, one who didn't mind being quoted. "Do I think Charles Enderlin lost a good opportunity to own up to a mistake early in the day, and spare himself this anguish? Of course. You know how we work in a hurry? Guy sends him pictures from Gaza, tells him the Israelis shot the kid, he believes him—I mean, even the Israeli Defense Forces spokesman believed it! But you can't own up one, two years after the fact. It's too late, it would mean you abdicate. It's a nice job Charles has, he's nearing retirement age. I don't think he wanted to rock the boat. You know Charles, he's always been status-conscious; he likes being the France 2 man in Israel. Plus, these people behind their computers, they're not real journalists, are they? You can't come from your day job and blog at night and imagine you've become a reporter. It doesn't don't work like that. There are standards."

Still, I asked, why sign a text adamantly asserting the dangerous notion that Muhammad al-Dura had been shot by the Israelis if you don't believe it?

"I was asked to. It was to support Charles. Did you know his wife is Danielle Kriegel? Daughter of Annie Kriegel [a great anti-Communist academic, now dead], sister of Blandine [a philosopher and a former Chirac aide at the Elysée palace], sister-in-law of Alexandre Adler [Blandine's husband, who writes about geostrategy and politics in most French quality newspapers, perennial guest on highbrow talk-shows]."

With all those credentials, the cloud of respectability surrounding Charles Enderlin was reaching pea-soup opacity. I tried one last time.

"Couldn't you have asked for the wording of the petition to be amended? Or started your own petition?" It would have been, Camus told me in the tone of someone who had too much on his plate to busy himself with ancillary details, "too complicated." We made a date for lunch two weeks hence and hung up.

At the other end of the scale, there was the rather intimidating star lawyer Theo Klein, getting on in years, who 20 years ago had been the president of CRIF, the official umbrella representative body of French Jews. I called him and reminded him that he'd been kind enough to invite me to his 1989 French Revolution Bicentennial party. (His office was on the Champs-Elysées, and it was the dream vantage point from which to watch the Jean-Paul Goude-designed parade and listen to Jessye Norman, draped in a giant French flag, belting out the "Marseillaise.") Theo Klein took my call pleasantly and dove into the thick of the matter.

"Well, perhaps the bullets were not Israeli after all, but if something was set up, I'm sure Charles had nothing to do with it. He is a remarkable journalist. I respect him, and I'm sure this matters more than whether a bullet came from the right or from the left. After all, many Palestinian children have been killed in the Intifada. You know, the Israelis haven't made half the noise about this that some French Jews have." He was outraged, *outraged* by the court ruling.

The daughter and granddaughter of lawyers myself, I gently reminded him that it wasn't done in France to criticize a court ruling. He changed the subject as if stung. "Really, I find deplorable that people are hounding Charles Enderlin like that. He has suffered, really suffered. And his poor wife. . . . They wanted to emigrate to America at one stage, do you realize?"

Well, I suggested, Americans were actually rather big on correcting reporters' mistakes.

"Surely not after so much time?"

Even after a long time. Corrections were duly appended to stories on the websites of newspapers, to prevent the eternal metastasizing of factual errors. Maître Klein marvelled for a moment at such thoroughness. It seemed, I could tell, a little pointless to him: He, like almost everyone else I'd spoken to, rated facts far below reputation. Still, I decided to go over that ground one last time. Wasn't there some doubt about the actual fatal shot? Why sign this text?

"My dear," Theo Klein said, in an infinitely weary voice, "I'm not a journalist. I haven't read this petition. I have macular retina degeneration. I can no longer read." ♦

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You deserve a factual look at . . .

The Golan Heights

To Whom Do They Belong? Can Israel Survive Without Them?

In a transparent effort to improve his thuggish image, Syria's president Bashar Assad has proposed to meet with Israeli government officials to discuss the possibility of peace. There can be no question that "peace" is not on Mr. Assad's mind, but rather the recovery of the Golan Heights, from which Syria has launched three major wars against Israel.

What are the facts?

Historical Background— The Golan was always part of the Jewish homeland. The Syrian claim to the Golan is tenuous. Syria, as a political entity, did not exist at all until after the first World War. Until then it was just another province in the Ottoman empire, with ill-defined borders. In 1923, in an Anglo/French great power play, the border between Syria and Israel was established. The Golan Heights were ceded to Syria. Even before the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Syrians, having heavily fortified the area, subjected the villages in northern Israel to almost daily shellings, making normal life impossible. In the 1967 Six-Day War, Syria attacked Israel and was defeated. Israel occupied the Golan Heights and in 1981, for all practical purposes, annexed them.

Syria and its President—Syria is the most destabilizing influence in the Middle East. It is classified by the U.S. State Department as a narcotic-dealing and terrorist state. Its main fury is directed against Israel, which is perceived as a bulwark of Western influence and civilization, both of which Syria abhors and totally rejects.

Syria's former president, Hafez Assad, was a tyrant, every bit as ruthless and as cunning as his unlamented Iraqi counterpart Saddam Hussein. His son, the current president, is equally despotic, though not quite as smart as his father. Syria is a world center for terrorism. It still harbors Nazi bigwigs, who found welcome there after the World War. Few doubt that Hafez Assad was the mastermind behind the attack on the US Marines barracks in Beirut in which 241 Americans were killed. The Syrian government oversees one of the largest narcotics and counterfeiting operations in the world.

Military Security—The Golan is a small plateau of about 400 square miles. If it were a part of Syria it would be less than 1% of its territory. But it is of supreme strategic importance to Israel. Its high ground provides early-warning capability, without which Israel—just as in 1948, in 1967, and in 1973—would be subject to surprise attack by the Syrians. Its loss would obligate Israel to stay on constant alert and to maintain a state of readiness and mobilization that would be economically and socially untenable. The Golan, which ranges up to a height of 2300 ft., dominates the Jordan Valley, the lowest point on earth, about 700 ft. below sea level. On the Golan itself, there are only two natural terrain bottlenecks through which tanks can advance. Those choke points are defensible and made possible the repulse of 1400 Syrian tanks that attacked Israel in the 1973 war. But with the Golan in Syrian hands, and without the radar installations that would give Israel warning of any military movements, thousands of tanks—backed up by missiles and airplanes—could overrun Israel in a matter of hours. It would be a strategically impossible situation, especially for a country as small as Israel—smaller than Lake Michigan, smaller by half than San Bernardino County in California. The Golan does not make for perfect defense, but it gives Israel a small, vitally important breathing space for mobilization.

> "With the Golan in Israeli hands, attacking Arab armies could be confident of defeat, and peace would be preserved. To hand back the Golan to Syria at this time would be a prescription for war and for Israel's destruction."

The Golan is the source of over one-third of Israel's fresh water. In 1964, with the Golan in Syrian hands, Syria attempted to divert these headwaters and to cripple Israel's water supply. It is more than likely that, given another opportunity, Syria would once again attempt to destroy Israel's water supply.

Syria has attacked Israel three times across the Golan. Given its implacable hostility, no responsible Israeli leader could possibly return the Golan to Syria. If it were to give up the high ground of the Golan and return to the "death trap" borders of 1967 or anything close to it, Israel, in order to survive, would have to rely on the good will of the Arab states, whose main policy objective is the destruction of Israel. Even though peace-for-peace would be the best solution, how about this: In order to assuage Arab pride, consider granting formal ownership of the Golan to Syria and having Israel—given the precedents of Guantánamo and Hong Kong—lease it back for a hundred-year period. An aggressor will attack only if confident of victory. With the Golan in Israeli hands, attacking Arab armies could be confident of defeat, and peace would be preserved. To hand back the Golan to Syria at this time would be a prescription for war and for Israel's destruction.

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Edward Flynn, David Lawrence, Edward Kelly, James Farley, Hubert Humphrey (foreground), 1948 Democratic National Convention

LISA LARSEN / TIME & LIFE PICTURES / GETTY IMAGES

Talking Politics

What are they really saying? BY CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

Mr. William Safire would have made—indeed he does make, in another of his incarnations—a highly serviceable lexicographer. But he would have chafed under Dr. Johnson's humble self-definition of the calling as that of "a harmless drudge." Drudge maybe; harmless never. There must needs be a sting, as in this most seemingly innocuous and topical of derivations and definitions:

> **Candidate** . . . The word comes from the Latin *candidatus*, wearer of a white toga, which the Roman office-seekers always wore as a symbol of purity. The same root gave the language *candor* and *incandescence*, qualities that candidates occasionally have.

One admires the dryness here, which comes partly from Safire's appreciation of the antiquity of political discourse and, indeed, of cliché:

> Most of the seemingly "new" language is surprisingly old: Henry IV's *chicken in every pot*, Al Smith's *cooing doves* and Thomas Jefferson's *war hawk* accusation, Henry Clay's struggle against the *can't win* technique, Alf Landon's borrowing of *New Frontier* from Henry Wallace, Teddy Roosevelt's blast at the *lunatic fringe* . . .

Safire's Political Dictionary
by William Safire
Oxford, 896 pp., $22.95

And indeed, Aristotle's **political animal.** Safire himself is so politicized a beast that he helped begin the vogue for attaching the "-gate" suffix to any Washington scandal, in the conscious hope that over time the habit would make Watergate appear just one offense among many. In his entry on the subject, he rather modestly downplays his own role in this euphemizing of Richard Nixon.

One of the pleasures of toying with dictionaries is the discovery—akin to the delight of the now-vanished index-card system in a library—of the useful reference for which one was *not* looking. Had I not taken care to pursue my old anti-Safire vendetta all the way to **-gate construction** on page 275, I would not have discovered that Elbridge Gerry's name was pronounced with a hard "g" and that he's probably been unfairly saddled with the etymology of the term "gerrymander."

Thus you may want to look up the deeper meaning of the phrase **inside baseball,** and then find yourself musing on the subsequent entry for **inside the Beltway,** and perhaps be amazed to find, as I was, that this expression was partly launched by Vice President Bush on *Meet the Press* in 1984. (He employed it in its original populist sense, to denote a topic that was of no interest to the broad

Christopher Hitchens, columnist for Vanity Fair, *is the author, most recently, of* Thomas Paine's "Rights of Man": A Biography.

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masses, and thus additionally helped to establish it as a term used largely by Washington elitists who claim to know what it is that the Great Unwashed really do and do not care about.)

Great Unwashed itself, I was amused to discover, entered our language as a manifestation of defiant pride rather than as a piece of insulting condescension: It didn't even go through the metamorphosis of words—such as "Tory," "suffragette," and "Impressionist"—that originated as insults and were then adopted ironically by their targets.

Occasionally Safire misses a small trick. A long entry for the suffix **ism**, cautioning us against the generalizations that can result from too lavish a use of it, makes some sound anti-**ism** observations, but neglects to stress how useful these three letters can be and forgets just how wrong the British Foreign Office got it by stating complacently, after the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939, that "all the isms are now wasms."

On the other hand, his long discussion of the origin of the term **Islamofascism** is as exhaustive as one could wish, combining a good deal of nuance with some old-fashioned digging and research (the first major usage of the word coming from the French Marxist Maxime Rodinson) and allowing room for both linguistic and hermeneutic maneuver. I should perhaps add that I am myself cited in this very entry, and that every wrinkle of what I had attempted to convey is encapsulated in the relevant paragraph. It's extremely unusual for one to be able to say that.

Still, and given the reverence for history that is one of his stronger points, Safire can sometimes be rather slapdash. A very long discussion of the key phrase **Cold War**, where he divides the honors of the coinage between Herbert Bayard Swope, editor and speechwriter for Bernard Baruch, and Walter Lippmann, fails entirely to notice that George Orwell probably first employed the expression in a short essay on nuclear weapons in 1946.

As against that, Safire does seem to confirm what I have long feared; namely that it was Joseph Goebbels from whom Winston Churchill annexed the potent image of the **Iron Curtain**. The idea of **passing the torch** is probably as old as the Greeks, but it seems peculiar to spend so much time and space on it without citing Sir Henry Newbolt's poem, "Vitai Lampada." The authorship of the celebrated Barry Goldwater phrases about extremism in the defense of liberty and moderation in the pursuit of justice may well have been "attributed to speechwriter Karl Hess" but is much more likely to stand to the credit of Professor Harry Jaffa.

(Safire redeems himself here, though, by quoting Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"—"Perhaps the South, the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists"—which was written a year earlier, and wondering how things might have been different if Goldwater had cited *that*.)

Sometimes the keyword is a little buried. If I wanted to look up "jugular instinct" I would probably flap through to "J" instead of consulting under **instinct for the jugular**. However, once I had got there I was rewarded, after various sanguinary and carnivorous reflections on the jugular and, indeed, the carotid, by the information that Henry Kissinger thought that James Schlesinger was a mere details man with "an instinct for the capillaries." Worth noting and, unlike other Kissinger attributions such as power being aphrodisiac, arguably original.

Safire's job is to record and chart usage and not—as he sometimes does in his "On Language" column in the *New York Times*—to try and put stale and stupid expressions out of business or out of circulation. However, he does have a very extended and very amusing "go" at the stale word **watershed**, and at the incredible number of ways in which it can be folded into a mixed or meaningless metaphor. He gallantly takes the opportunity here to bow to the shade of the late Meg Greenfield, who made war on the word even in the days of Vietnam (where "watersheds" sometimes turned up "at the end of the tunnel").

But for the most part, he is patient with the boilerplate of quotidian political speech, and goes to the trouble of discovering, say, who gave birth and currency to the mantra about **waste, fraud and abuse** in the budgetary system. (Should you care, it was probably by Joseph Califano out of Jimmy Carter. That sounds about right.)

A good dictionary can often do duty, as in the above instances, for an encyclopedia. Safire doesn't always rise to this standard. Under **WASP**, for example, we find: "White Anglo-Saxon Protestant: an ethnic group." Surely the chief interest of this acronymous word (coined by E. Digby Baltzell in 1962) lies precisely in the fact that it does *not* merely denote ethnicity. Apart from its redundancies—after all, there are no JASPS or BASPS on the scene, and the P is hardly necessary—nobody would ever describe the late George Wallace as a WASP. Whereas the late William Buckley Jr.—who was both Irish and Catholic by provenance—had something quintessentially, shall we say, WASP-ish about him. It's a term of class and status, in other words, and needs a touch more work and subtlety than it gets here. In the same breath, or at least in a closely related one, I note sadly that Safire repeats the common error of describing the Irish Whig Edmund Burke as an English Conservative.

For value added, above and before the citations themselves, he gives us a term-by-term terminological prologue on presidential phrase-making. I had forgotten Carter's use of **moral equivalent of war** (rendered by Safire as MEOW) and Bush senior's **like ugly on an ape**, while to review the torrent of lingo that was unleashed by Watergate is to feel something like reverence for the good fortune that was brought us by the exposure of that third-rate burglary.

At the end of each section, Safire appends a terse summary of "coinages," "descriptions," and "attacks." Thus for Ronald Reagan the third category in its entirety reads, somehow oddly, **amen corner**, **amiable dunce**, **October surprise**, **sleaze factor**. Where did Iran-contra go? These are details, but then nobody should know better than William Safire, who even knows what the meaning of is is, that the details are what it's in. ♦

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FDR and Churchill, Quebec, 1943

ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN / CORBIS

Isn't That Special?

Anglo-American relations are more complicated than you think. **BY ANDREW ROBERTS**

How deep are the historical roots of the Special Relationship? Is it simply a marriage of convenience that has managed to last for most of the past century because the dangers that have brought the United States and Great Britain together have tended to be more perilous than the factors that divide them? Or is there something about the linguistic, democratic, jurisprudential and historical ties that mean that there is something more than mere long-term self-interest? With the United States and Great Britain, as well as Anglosphere countries such as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand presently bearing the Western brunt of the war against terror, these questions deserve a carefully considered answer.

Unlikely Allies
Britain, America and the Victorian Beginnings of the Special Relationship
by Duncan Andrew Campbell
Hambledon & London,
307 pp., $31.95

In this engaging and well-researched book, Duncan Andrew Campbell, an academic from the University of Wales currently working in Washington, seeks antecedents for the Special Relationship far back into the 19th century; despite its subtitle he goes beyond Queen Victoria's birth, back as far as the Treaty of Ghent (1815). He finds much culturally, economically, and diplomatically to suggest that the English-speaking peoples should date their friendship back to those early days before the American Civil War. The book is revisionist, well-written, and satisfyingly short. Sadly, though, its thesis is wrong.

For all that Queen Victoria herself might have been pro-American—welcoming the transatlantic telegraph, opposing slavery, writing sorrowfully as a fellow-widow to Mary Todd Lincoln, sending books to stock the Chicago public library after the 1871 fire, and so on—her ministers watched the United States with profound imperial suspicion. Be it Canadian border disputes, Newfoundland fishery incidents, the kidnapping of Confederate diplomats from the British mail packet *Trent*, the threat of "Yankee Democracy," naval rivalry in the Pacific, or any number of other issues, the only special relationship between London and Washington for most of the 19th century was one of mutual irritation.

The burning of the Capitol, White House, and Treasury buildings in Washington by Admiral Sir George Cockburn in 1814 had been a direct consequence of the American burning of York (present-day Toronto) and Newark, although apparently it is a myth that the British soldiery voted to set aflame "this hive of Yankee democracy" and quite untrue that the White House was only painted white over its original pink in order to mask the unsightly marks of arson. When Cockburn burned down the offices of the *National Intelligencer*, which had libeled him, Campbell wittily observes that it made him "one of the few individuals to get satisfaction at the expense of the American press." Cockburn, whom Campbell describes as "the most unwelcome visitor ever to dine at the White House," later had the further satisfaction of conveying Napoleon to St. Helena.

After the Battle of New Orleans in 1815—in which a mere 291 Britons died—bloodletting between the English-speaking peoples ended forever. "The War of 1812 was an avoidable conflict," believes Campbell, "that was in the interests of neither Britain nor the U.S. and one in which neither side held the moral high ground."

War after 1815 was unthinkable, largely because it would have been a

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conflict between the whale and the wolf. The American wolf would have fallen upon practically defenseless Canada, snatching a vast and vital part of the British Empire. Meanwhile, the British whale, in the shape of the Royal Navy, which was far larger than the U.S. Navy for most of this period, would have sailed up the Hudson River and shelled Manhattan. Mutually assured destruction worked in our ancestors' day just as surely as in ours. Yet there were unpleasant moments, especially over the Trent Affair during the Civil War, defused in part by Prince Albert just before he expired.

The moment that the fear of a Wolf-versus-Whale conflict was greatest, however—during the Venezuelan Crisis of 1896—is written off by Campbell entirely: "Although it is sometimes cited as the last time Britain and the United States nearly went to war," the author opines, "there is not much substance to the claim. . . . It lasted about three days in the United States." In fact, it went on for over four months, and on December 17, 1895, President Cleveland told Congress that it was "the duty of the United States to resist by any means in its power . . . the appropriation by Great Britain of any lands . . . which after investigation we have determined of right belong to Venezuela." The Senate chamber rang with applause, and he won unanimous support for a purely American commission to investigate Venezuela's claims. He had sounded, as the British ambassador to Washington, Lord Pauncefote, reported to the prime minister, Lord Salisbury, "the note of war." It was a note supported by over 40 state governors.

The German and French press joined the American in paroxysms of excitement about Britain's international isolation and her inevitable humiliation. Canada looked to her military preparedness in the event of war with America. The excitable American yellow press called for war with Britain, as did ex-President Harrison. The Irish Nationalist MP John Redmond even wrote to the *New York World* to say that Irish sentiment would be supporting America in the coming conflict. "A war with America—not this year but in the not distant future—has become something more than a possibility," Salisbury wrote to the chancellor of the exchequer, Sir Michael Hicks Beach, on January 2, 1896, denouncing "Cleveland's electioneering dodge."

As a result of the Venezuelan war scare, but also British support for America in the Spanish American War (whereas most of Europe supported Spain), Theodore Roosevelt's Anglophilia (despite boasting he had not a drop of English blood), and the McKinley administration's support for Britain in the Boer War (in contrast with much of the American population), on November 18, 1901, Lord Pauncefote and Secretary of State John Hay signed the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, which was the founding document of the Special Relationship.

Covering the isthmian canal due to be excavated in Latin America, the Treaty inaugurated a number of vital Anglo-American agreements over the next decade, covering such issues as the Alaskan and British Columbian border, Newfoundland fisheries, and Jamaica. Although the United States was to keep its plans to invade Canada up to date until the 1920s, the Special Relationship was firmly in place. Yet the estimable Pauncefote is only mentioned once in this book, and then in a footnote, misspelled.

Campbell is far better at spotting the inherent suspicion that many Europeans have always felt about Anglo-American kinship and unity, and still do. The farseeing British journalist W.T. Stead reported, long before the Great War, that Kaiser Wilhelm II "foresees the necessity of forming a European Customs Union against the United States on similar lines to the Continental blockade devised by Napoleon against England, in order to safeguard the interests and assure the freedom of Continental commerce at the expense of America's development."

Stead saw how German, Austrian, Italian, and Belgian intellectuals' opposition to Anglo-American amity meant that in order to "defend themselves against the USA, these thinkers advocate the creation of what would be the United States of Europe." Considering that Stead predicted all this in a book entitled *The Americanization of the World: Or the Trend of the Twentieth Century* that was published as long ago as 1902, it is all the more tragic that he should have drowned on the *Titanic* 10 years later, before he was able to see his prophecies come true. For although Bismarck stated that the most important factor of the 19th century was that Great Britain and the United States both spoke the same tongue, how much more important was it for the survival of freedom in the 20th?

Campbell is also good on the symbiotic politico-social networks that were built up during the era: There were no fewer than four senior late-Victorian British cabinet ministers—Sir William Harcourt, James Bryce, Lord Randolph Churchill and Joseph Chamberlain—who were married to Americans, for example. There are also several excellent vignettes, especially about writers such as Henry James, H.G. Wells, Mark Twain, and especially Charles Dickens, who repaid the adoration and hospitality he received in Boston in 1842 with his rabidly anti-Yankee *American Notes* and *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and eventually also with support for the Confederacy. Campbell also thinks pleasingly laterally, connecting, for example, the secession of Texas from Mexico in 1836 to the almost-contemporaneous rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada.

Yet on his central thesis, that the Special Relationship has deep roots in the Victorian era, Campbell is plain wrong. The two countries were conscious rivals until the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, which was not signed until after the queen-empress's death. Of course, this should not put anyone off reading such an entertaining, thought-provoking, and fluent work, especially in the 150th anniversary of the laying of the transatlantic cable, which Queen Victoria told James Buchanan that she hoped would "prove an additional link between the nations whose friendship is founded on their common interest and reciprocal esteem."

Although the cable broke down the very next month, the common interests and reciprocal esteem are still in good repair today. ♦

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Boris the Good

Unfortunately, not great. BY ANDREW NAGORSKI

Campaigning in Rostov, 1996

YURI KADOBNOV / EPA / CORBIS

It was hard not to admire Boris Yeltsin when he first emerged as a primal force in Moscow. After all, he demonstrated tremendous political acumen and courage. He ostentatiously quit the Communist party before the Soviet system collapsed, and he stood up to the hardliners who tried to topple Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991, jumping on a tank to talk the army into turning against the would-be putschists. He then orchestrated the dissolution of the Soviet Union, leaving him in charge of the new Russia and his archrival Gorbachev out of a job. He also vowed to turn Russia into a democratic state, with a free market economy and a newly empowered citizenry.

Yeltsin
A Life
by Timothy J. Colton
Basic, 640 pp., $35

When Yeltsin died on April 23, 2007, Western leaders looked back nostalgically at his era and his efforts to end Cold War tensions. I happened to be visiting President George H.W. Bush in Houston the next day, just as he was preparing to board a presidential plane that would take him and Bill Clinton to Yeltsin's funeral.

"There was one thing Clinton and I agreed on: We both liked Yeltsin," he said. But it's no accident that the Yeltsin era—and particularly, the initial optimism of that period—feels like ancient history now. In today's Russia the 1990s are dismissed as the wild years, which set the stage for Vladimir Putin's reversion to strong-arm rule that has eliminated almost all checks and balances, steadily strangled political freedoms, and allowed an oil-rich, cash-flush elite to throw its weight around again at home and abroad.

This latest biography of the father of the new Russia feels like a product of earlier times, when the Yeltsin glow was still there and Putin's shadow was barely visible. In *Yeltsin: A Life*, Harvard professor Timothy J. Colton chronicles, often in painstaking detail, his political twists and turns, the multiple health crises that accompanied his latter years in power, and his endless hiring and firing of key people as he tried to keep one step ahead of the shifting alliances around him.

What's sorely lacking, however, is the bigger picture that has been emerging with a bit of historical distance, and the kind of critical thinking about an innately attractive leader with a surfeit of glaringly visible failings. Colton is too much of an admirer of his subject and of his early, admittedly impressive, career to fill that void. He has produced a well-researched book with many interesting details drawn from his interviews with Yeltsin, his family, and a variety of other key players, but one that feels oddly incomplete.

Colton concedes that Yeltsin was "enigmatic and flawed," but insists he was a hero nonetheless. "As a democratizer, he is in the company of Nelson Mandela, Lech Walesa, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Vaclav Havel," he writes.

The Gorbachev-Yeltsin comparisons and contrasts are a subject unto themselves, and South Africa presents a very different model. But when it comes to the most revealing comparisons, with Walesa and Havel, the results clearly contradict Colton: Poland and the Czech Republic have emerged as stable democracies; Russia is once again pursuing its own path, where all that is left of democratic practices are the formal trappings, like the sham election of

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Dmitry Medvedev in March, and none of the substance.

Yeltsin does deserve full credit for his role as, in Colton's words, "the dragon slayer who sallied forth from the belly of the beast." A loyal Communist party apparatchik for most of his career, he was perceptive enough to recognize that Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika couldn't save the Soviet system, and then to launch his bold initiatives that would hasten its demise. Aside from developing a new relationship with Washington, Yeltsin won the sympathy of some of Russia's neighbors, who were still smarting from Soviet subjugation.

His most stunning gesture: admitting historical truths—most notably, Soviet responsibility for the murder of thousands of Polish army officers in the Katyn Forest near Smolensk in 1940. His predecessors had blamed the Germans, but in 1992, Yeltsin dispatched an envoy to Warsaw with the original Kremlin order for those executions. At home, Yeltsin also encouraged efforts to break with the country's history of lies, and he appeared genuinely shocked by successive new revelations, such as Lenin's orders to execute 25,000 Russian Orthodox priests during the civil war.

But soon Yeltsin's domestic constituents were far more preoccupied with the impact of his economic program, which at first offered far more shock than therapy. His abrupt price liberalization led to astronomical inflation (2,520 percent in 1992), the loss of the life savings of millions, and a steady decline in national output.

"As downturns go, Russia's in the 1990s ranks with the Great Depression of 1929-33 in the United States," Colton points out. Little wonder that Yeltsin became the focus of widespread disillusionment and anger. While most Russians suffered, a new class of oligarchs divided up—and often fought over—the spoils of the Communist system. Corruption, mob hits, and general lawlessness prevailed. And increasingly, Yeltsin rewarded the oligarchs—to wit, the "loans-for-shares" scheme that helped bail him out at the cost of further plundering of the state's assets, only to trigger more public fury.

Colton acknowledges all those negative trends, but never examines the impact on the lives of ordinary Russians in more than an abstract way. He implicitly suggests that no transition from the Soviet to a market economy could have avoided widespread pain and abuses. That's certainly a tenable argument. And it's worth noting that the Yeltsin era was marked by a steep decline in oil prices, the exact opposite of today's situation that has allowed the Putin regime to trumpet its economic successes. But it was Yeltsin's political tactics, as much as his economic decisions, which were responsible for the fact that Russia has deviated so dramatically from the democratic course that countries such as Poland and the Czech Republic have followed.

As much as he wanted to consider himself a democrat, Yeltsin had little patience for outright defiance. When opposition legislators refused to heed his edict to disband parliament in 1993, he ordered his troops and tanks to shell and storm the same building where he had defied the coup plotters two years earlier. The official death toll was 187, and the building was left a burnt-out shell. Yeltsin then pushed through a referendum on a new constitution that awarded him sweeping presidential powers. To ensure its passage, some of the extreme Communist and nationalist publications were closed down, while the mainstream media found themselves increasingly manipulated or controlled by the new oligarchs. But Yeltsin's approval ratings continued to drop, particularly after he launched a highly unpopular war in Chechnya. His frequent disappearances, prompted by his heart problems and drinking binges, only contributed further to this downward trend.

The guarantee that Yeltsin wouldn't abuse his new powers was supposed to be his own commitment to democracy, and Colton is willing to give him the benefit of the doubt in most cases. It's true that the Russian media were still freer than they ever had been (or would be afterwards) and that people began to take new freedoms for granted, such as the right to travel. But unlike Walesa and Havel, Yeltsin didn't build democratic institutions that he would respect, even when they didn't work in his favor. Rather than seeking consensus, he issued an endless stream of decrees, thus keeping alive the tradition of arbitrary executive power. When Lech Walesa was faced with a resurgent party of ex-Communists, he sometimes envied Yeltsin's methods. But he never imitated them. In fact, Walesa preferred to lose to the ex-Communists rather than destroy Poland's fragile new democratic institutions. As a result, democracy was strengthened even when its architects lost at the polls.

Contrast that record with Yeltsin's. Arguing his case for a constitution that gave him sweeping presidential powers, he warned that anything less could lead to chaos, and then "people would demand a dictator." The irony is that the former KGB agent Vladimir Putin, whom he plucked from relative obscurity, has played that role quite well. Colton blithely dismisses charges that Yeltsin cut a deal with Putin to protect his family and entourage from corruption charges. And he doesn't even mention the suspicious activities of the FSB (as the KGB is now called) that have prompted a few vocal critics to charge that a series of apartment bombings that took 300 lives in 1999, which Putin blamed on Chechen terrorists, may have been a provocation. The backlash to those bombings propelled Putin to an easy victory in the presidential contest of 2000. The rest, of course, is some well-known recent history.

The other irony is that, to justify his relentless power grab, Putin convinced most Russians that the 1990s under Yeltsin had been a period of unremitting anarchy and injustice. In fact, there was far more hope in those years that Russia would somehow find its way to a more open system than there is now. A new Yeltsin biography should make it easier to understand why the opposite could and did happen, but Colton generally prefers to downplay that part of the story.

There's no doubt that Boris Yeltsin is a far more sympathetic character than Vladimir Putin, and that Putin is to blame for Russia's path in recent years. But his enabler can't be left off the hook, either. ♦

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JOHN GARRETT / CORBIS

After the Fox

Riding to hounds and the death of Old England.

BY EDWARD SHORT

In *Hunting the Fox* (1921), his celebrated handbook, Lord Willoughby de Broke praised the resiliency of foxhunting.

> When we declared war upon Germany in 1914, many people thought, some perhaps hoped that foxhunting in the British Isles was doomed. It would appear that the former are likely to experience a pleasant shock … while the latter … may be disappointed. … Never were cavalry so quickly or so well mounted as those regiments of Regulars and Yeomanry who embarked for France in August 1914. … Foxhunting will surely survive from its own innate qualities. The manner in which it has lived through all the obstacles of war time is a sufficient testimony to its vitality.

Blood Sport
Hunting in Britain Since 1066
by Emma Griffin
Yale, 296 pp., $55

Lord Willoughby, a Tory radical who owned 18,000 acres in Warwickshire, and once threatened to lead a cavalry charge up Whitehall if H.H. Asquith and the Liberals granted Ireland home rule, might have somewhat exaggerated the contribution of foxhunting to England's war effort, but he was right about what would ultimately decide its future. "Hunting," he said, "depends for its existence on the support of public opinion."

In *Blood Sport* Emma Griffin confirms the accuracy of Willoughby's analysis. Since the 18th century, foxhunting had survived any number of immense social upheavals—the Industrial Revolution, the coming of the railways, the great reform bills, two world wars, the spoliation of the English countryside to make way for the suburb and the automobile—but what it could not survive was a campaign to subvert its public support, fully backed by Labour parliamentarians.

When Willoughby tried to call to mind the typical opponent of foxhunting, he could only see a spoilsport: "Anti-social and un-English in whatever rank of life he is to be found … he could best be described as the spiritual descendant of that often-quoted band of reformers who wished to put a stop to bear-baiting not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators." With the passing of the 2004 Hunting Act, this antisocial, un-English creature was in the saddle, he had the whip hand, and foxhunting found itself finally at bay.

Professor Griffin wants to see moral principle behind this reversal of fortune: "The most enduring argument to come from the anti-hunting lobby was their belief that it was wrong for people to take pleasure in the act of killing. It was not simply the fact of cruelty that offended them. … It was the human participation, and indeed delight, in the act

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of killing that consistently underpinned their opposition to hunting."

But her research shows that there was no consistent argument underpinning opposition to hunting: The argument against cruelty was always alloyed with misinformed class envy, party politics, and, worse, criminal mayhem. Nevertheless, though she ascribes more coherence to the antihunt lobby than it possesses, *Blood Sport* is not only a scholarly but an entertaining book, which covers enormous ground with deft succinctness. Professor of history at the University of East Anglia, Griffin is that rare thing: a talented scholar who is also a gifted writer.

Blood Sport opens with the Normans introducing their new vassals to a hunting technique that would permanently change British hunting: the *par force* hunt, which matched a small group of hunters against a single wild animal. The Normans usually hunted a deer or a boar, though the single animal changed over the centuries. In contrast to a drive hunt, where hunters drove their quarry to an ambush, the *par force* hunt pitted human skill against animal guile more sportingly by allowing the animal to dictate the chase. And since no one knew where the animal would lead, the chase became all the more exhilarating.

Griffin sees how this innovation continues to animate the present: "The pastime that grand landowners, pig-farmers, agricultural laborers and elderly ladies congregated in London to preserve in March 1998 may in fact be directly traced to the *par force* hunting introduced by the Norman nobility." The Countryside Alliance, forged to repel Labour's assault on country life, of which foxhunting is so central a part, has indeed immemorial roots.

Between the Norman Conquest and the English Civil War, wild deer were the preferred quarry of hunters, prized as much for their majesty as their delectable flesh. But since they required large tracts of woodland, and rich landowners were unable to keep such lucrative land for such unprofitable purposes, deer became scarce. This was compounded during the Civil War by the wanton slaughter of deer by republican rebels intent on flouting the game laws.

"A fine meal of venison on the plates of the poor signified the world turned upside down," as Griffin nicely puts it, "a motif endlessly reworked in the tales of Robin Hood." By the 18th century deer had become so scarce that deer-hunting could only be had in deer parks or in out-of-the-way Exmoor and Scotland.

Foxhunting proved the perfect antidote to this paucity of deer. Of course, foxes, being vermin, lacked the *éclat* and edibility of deer; but once the enclosures of the 1760s added hedges and fences to the formerly open hunting field, the quality of chase that the fox provided, which now included breakneck jumping, could be much more challenging than the deer chase provided. Moreover, for a commercial people, necessarily committed to a certain plebeian inclusiveness, the fox had advantages deer lacked: He could be hunted in more places at more times by more hunters and, like foxhunting itself, he was eminently adaptable to different terrains.

This is why the greatest of all foxhunting heroes was not an aristocratic landowner but John Jorrocks, R.S. Surtees's Cockney grocer, who, as Griffin remarks, "took advantage of the opening of each train line to visit new hunting country, each time combining hunting with business—'hunting one day and selling teas another.'"

Lord Willoughby understood the importance of the sport's inclusiveness when he affirmed one of the great principles of foxhunting, which the town-bred supporters of the Labour party continue to dispute: "If [foxhunting] is to retain its vigor, it must never become the privilege of any particular class. Like all other really good things it is either national or it is nothing."

For the time being, Labour has made sure that foxhunting is nothing. But there are many other people in the country who are intent on demonstrating that it is as national now as it has always been—perhaps more so, when so much of the traditional fabric of English society is being unraveled by politicians.

Griffin questions Prince Charles's claim that he "met more farmers and more ordinary blokes [foxhunting] than in any other exercise or sport." For the author, Charles's "assessment surely tells us more about the rarefied social circles in which he customarily moved than about the openness of hunting in the Shires in the 1990s." But the Countryside Alliance, made up of all classes, corroborates Charles's claim. The class argument against foxhunting is founded on mistaken class envy, not on any familiarity with the men and women actually attached to the sport.

Griffin may favor the cruelty argument, but she knows as a good historian that the cry against what one critic called "amateur butchery" had never been popular. "Through much of the twentieth century," she writes, "the animal protection cause had been confined to the realms of literature, art and liberal intellectual thought; the protectionists' goal to free hares and foxes from the tyranny of hunting was no more than a dream."

With Labour backing, however, anything was possible: "When Parliament became involved at the very end of the century . . . their dreams were turned into reality; their idealized vision of humane and civilized England proved more powerful than any had expected."

To claim that Labour's England is a "humane and civilized England" because it has outlawed foxhunting is risible. What about the 200,000 children that the National Health Service aborts each year, including children with special needs? Do they redound to this "humane and civilized" England?

A more balanced approach to the debate can be found in *Child of the Twenties* (1959), the autobiography of Frances Donaldson, a Labour supporter who hunted the same country in Sussex that Siegfried Sassoon described in his classic *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (1928).

"A lot has been written about hunting," she says,

> but much of it is without knowledge. It is too late now to set out to defend the hunting of the fox, but what can be defended is the attitude of the people who take part in it. This is not, as is so often believed, in the least sadistic, although it may be completely callous. Country people have a necessary callousness which is not understood by townsfolk. Anyone who has ever seen

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a fox pause and look about him as he crosses a ride in a wood in front of the hounds, knows full well that his fear is not nearly so great as is that of a sheep every time the shepherd catches him to trim his feet or inject him against some disease. A sheep is cornered and caught often in his life, and whenever this happens he suffers the extreme of hysterical fear. Every time his fear is quite irrational except the last time; and then he is right, because he is on his way to the butcher. When a pig is killed he is caught and held, and a vein in his throat is cut, so that he shall bleed slowly to death to make a meal for animal-lovers. And all the time he is dying he screams, a harsh and blood-curdling scream that everyone on the farm dislikes to hear. He is not screaming because he is dying a slow and tragic death, but because he is being held . . . And the pig and the sheep and rabbits disturbed playing in a hollow in the evening sun seem to experience a fear unknown to the fox, who is wily and brave, except in the last extremity, when, of course, one does not know. But death comes to everybody in the end.

What hunt saboteurs most oppose is not cruelty to foxes but Old England, traditional England, the unbiddable English countryside. The hunting debate, at its heart, is about English identity. Griffin is not unaware of this. "Underneath all the hyperbole," she admits, "the defenders of hunting had a clear vision of British society. . . . [They] stood for the Old England of traditional values, for a society in which individuals, not government, made decisions for themselves, a place above all where tradition triumphed over progress."

But that tendentious *progress* is misleading. The question is not whether England should embrace tradition or progress but whether any progress is possible without tradition. Too many in the Labour camp see Old England as something static, reactionary, superannuated. But Old England, like any good tradition, is a living thing. Roger Scruton makes an eloquent case for the vitality of England's rural tradition in his excellent *On Hunting* (2001). Still, Griffin is surely right when she says: "Whether a change in political winds will reverse the fortunes of this ancient sport in the new millennium remains to be seen." ♦

Martin Amis

PAULO FRIDMAN / CORBIS

Unholy Thoughts

A Bright Young Thing grapples with the post-9/11 world. **BY STEFAN BECK**

In 2006 Martin Amis took a potentially career-ending risk: He told the truth. In an interview with Ginny Dougary of the (London) *Times*, he confessed that he'd felt "a definite urge—don't you have it?—to say, 'The Muslim community will have to suffer until it gets its house in order.' What sort of suffering? Not letting them travel. Deportation—further down the road. Curtailing of freedoms."

The Second Plane
September 11: Terror and Boredom
by Martin Amis
Knopf, 224 pp., $24

When the literary critic Terry Eagleton drew attention to Amis's mostly overlooked comments—in the same calculating fashion that certain "Muslim leaders" drew attention to the mostly overlooked *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons—Amis defended them as the product of "a thought experiment, or a mood experiment." It's a fancy way of saying that he was angry, that he felt something, however ugly, and described it honestly.

The late Oriana Fallaci did this twice, first in *The Rage and the Pride* and then in *The Force of Reason*, and it nearly landed her in the dock. It seems that spontaneous emotion is the luxury of those willing to buttress it with violence; the rest of us are expected to conceal, whitewash, and falsify. But what we have in *The Second Plane*, Amis's collection of September 11-related journalism and fiction, is a man unwilling to stoop to any of the above—but perfectly willing to sound a bit crazy.

Amis opens the centerpiece of this book, "Terror and Boredom: The Dependent Mind" (previously published as "The Age of Horrorism"), with an anecdote about a friend who,

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boxed in by the Osama bin Laden Fan Club in Peshawar, thought on his feet to get out of a bind. Asked whether he "liked" Osama, the man answered, "Of course. . . . All men are my brothers." A good line, Amis allows—but "all men are not my brothers. Why? Because all women are my sisters. And the brother who denies the rights of his sister: that brother is not my brother."

In many ways this is the linchpin of Amis's argument. We're warned by his detractors that he's an Islamophobe, a racist, a hysterical fool; but the problem he identifies isn't one of religion, race, or ethnicity. It's a problem of youth, stymied masculinity, and, no matter how absurd it may sound, poor parenting. To read the comments following what Eagleton et al. selectively quoted is to find Amis struggling with inescapable frustration:

> They hate us for letting our children have sex and take drugs—well, they've got to stop their children killing people. It's a huge dereliction on their part.

This is less Enoch Powell than Bill Cosby—a reminder that, if parents sheltered their children from truly malignant influences while guiding their (gradual) assimilation into liberal society, the Semtex belt might be a bit less appealing.

"It has been suggested," Amis writes, "by serious commentators, that suicide-mass murderers are searching for the simplest means of getting a girlfriend." Is this a lazy oversimplification? It would be nice to think so. One of the most distressing aspects of the martyrdom myth is that it promises to fulfill the very desires a healthy soul is meant to outgrow in the course of mortal existence. If you regard polygamy as an affront to your "sisters," and alcohol as a terrestrial time-killer, you're liable to expect more of your afterlife.

Amis argues that a "rational response [to suicide-mass murder] would be something like an unvarying factory siren of unanimous disgust. But we haven't managed that. What we have managed, on the whole, is a murmur of dissonant evasion." For instance: Ronan Bennett, railing against Amis's supposed "intolerance of otherness," approvingly quotes Ian McEwan's *Guardian* essay, published just four days after the September 11 attacks: "Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality."

But what if "someone other than yourself" really is just a deluded teenager? Is this exercise in masochistic (not to say terminal) empathy still advisable? If we're going to take McEwan at his word, we might as well imagine what it's like to be Martin Amis: a manifestly talented and imaginative novelist with a deep-seated concern for the well-being of "half the human race: women," for whom confronting the suicide/mass murderer is as exasperating as it is frightening. That's not to mention that Amis is convinced, and rightly so, that his enemy is the "dependent mind," governed by the "leaden-witted circularity" of Islamist reasoning, presided over by the "lordly and unintelligent visage" of Osama bin Laden.

Amis has been accused, by Adam Kirsch in the *New York Sun*, of an "aesthetic, not to say hedonistic, understanding of liberalism," one unlikely "to inspire, in most readers, the kind of devotion that the defense of our liberties requires."

Kirsch agrees with Amis on the basics ("his refusal to make mental compromises with fundamentalism," for one) but he expects of his villains the same psychological complexity that has the Eagletons of the world fiddling with the DSM-IV and conflict resolution manuals while the world burns. Amis, the seasoned novelist, is the only one who seems to understand that this isn't a novel, that the characters may be as bland as rice pudding but their bombs will function just the same.

The two pieces of fiction Amis has included here, and a third one described because it was never completed, are crude, grotesque, and unmemorable. But it is Amis's great victory—philosophical, not aesthetic—to see not the banality but the juvenility of evil, to make his characters infuriatingly two-dimensional not because he lacks imagination but because he isn't showing off his chops—he's showing off theirs. Anyone who believes that jihadists speak in Hamlet soliloquies, or even that they ham it up like Hannibal Lecter, is deluding himself. The future promised us by Islamic radicalism is, as Amis genuinely fears, a wasteland of "perfect terror and perfect boredom, and of nothing else—a world with no games, no arts, and no women, a world where the sole entertainment is the public execution."

Is that fear, as Kirsch suggests, narcissistic? Is it a case of Amis putting his own "guild concern"—a world without great or good novels—above all else?

> All writers of fiction will at some point find themselves abandoning a piece of work—or find themselves "putting it aside," as we gently say. The original idea, the initiating "throb" (Nabokov), encounters certain "points of resistance" (Updike); and these points of resistance, on occasion, are simply too obdurate, numerous, and pervasive. You come to write the next page, and it's dead.

Islam is, he writes, "a total system, and like all such systems eerily amenable to satire. But with Islamism, with total malignancy, with total terror and total boredom, irony, even militant irony (which is what satire is), merely shrivels and dies." The attitude against which Amis has ranged his talents, with varying degrees of success, is one without the least interest in the next page: The next page isn't just dead; it's death.

Amis is squarely against religious belief, as "reality is sufficiently awesome as it stands." This might explain why he contemplates the stunted, uncomplicated "reality" of Islamism with such trepidation. (Of course, it needs no explanation, really: Beheading is sufficiently terrifying as it stands.) The alternative he presents isn't hedonism or aesthetic idolatry; it's the exercise of will and imagination raised to the status of religious ritual, the very antithesis of what he has called "dependence of mind." It encompasses his art, his family life, his unimpeded social interaction, his pleasure—indeed, everything.

The prospect of relinquishing that right to anyone is enough to bring out his rage, as it will be, one suspects and sincerely hopes, for many of us. ♦

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Speak the Speech

The twilight world of the White House ventriloquists.

BY JUDY BACHRACH

Ken Khachigian, Ronald Reagan, 1981

BETTMANN / CORBIS

Is there any creature in the world lower or more pitiful than a White House ghostwriter? I mean, yes, maybe a Hollywood scriptwriter. But at least they can strike. And in some instances their bosses are talented.

Imagine you are working for George Herbert Walker Bush, who gave his writers three rules. The first was that he did not like the word "I," as in "I want a bill that's going to stop crime" because that would be insulting to the police who were trying their best. The second Bush decree: His writers shouldn't pen speeches that were too emotional because he wasn't. And the third was that he wanted his speeches packed with a lot of Yogi Berra quotations. "I would rather quote Yogi Berra than Thomas Jefferson," the leader of the free world, as he was then called, told staffers.

White House Ghosts
Presidents and Their Speechwriters
by Robert Schlesinger
Simon & Schuster, 592 pp., $30

Whatever happened to the proposed era of Berra-isms, one wonders? Why wasn't Yogi offered a few bad meals at the White House mess in return for a few *mauvais mots*? "I know Texas has a lot of electrical votes"—Yogi's neat political observation to Bush Sr. would not, perhaps, have guaranteed him a landslide victory in 1992. But it might have provided a nice plebeian counterpoint to barcode gaffes at the checkout line.

Alas, *White House Ghosts* tends to pick up this and other topics and then, without examination or elaboration, toss them, the total effect being like looking at the underside of a tapestry. Lots of threads, no pattern.

In fact, even on completion of this 592-page volume, the reader will remain ignorant of any number of things about presidents and what they are scripted to say. For example: What did these unhappy writers going into the job actually *think* would be expected of them? Four more years of "a thousand points of light in a broad and peaceful sky" (a disturbing Peggy Noonan landscape, no longer hanging on living room walls). A reprise of "Read my lips: No new taxes" (Noonan as portraitist). A national plague of damp eyes and constricted throats on listening to, "I did *not* have sex with that woman—Miss Lewinsky"? Come to think of it, the author of that last phrase never is identified in this book.

Startling omissions, however, are only part of the problem. Schlesinger, who is the son of Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., speechwriter to John F. Kennedy and famous historian, is a laborious and dutiful chronicler. The early portions of *White House Ghosts*, devoted to the likes of Warren G. Harding, FDR, Harry Truman, and Ike, are earnest and just a bit dull. The chapter on JFK's speeches and speechwriters, a slight improvement, may indeed be fertile territory; but it is territory that, by now, is pretty well ploughed, and the original ploughers long ago wrote their own books.

It is worth noting that the best passages in *White House Ghosts* come from the author's own father. Schlesinger the Elder's caustic 45-year-old recipe for State Department policy statements could have been written this morning:

> Take a handful of clichés . . . repeat at five-minute intervals (lest the argument become clear or interesting), stir in the dough of the passive voice (the active voice assigns responsibility and was therefore hazardous) and garnish with self-serving rhetoric (Congress was unhappy unless we constantly proclaimed the rectitude of American motives).

In a similar vein: When speechwriter Jeff Shesol was debating whether or not to take a job in the Clinton White House at the precise moment that

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Kenneth Starr seemed poised to sink it, it was once again Schlesinger the Elder who offered some acerbic suggestions. Why not grab such an opportunity? he said. Either way, a speechwriter couldn't lose: "You'll either see a White House fighting for its life or a White House in a state of dissolution, both of which would be very interesting." Besides, he added, the job being dangled wasn't exactly brain surgery: "Have you ever written political speeches before? It's a particularly low form of rhetoric."

Is it really so low? Well—yes. Ventriloquism never has been considered the loftiest form of entertainment. Even when the substance is pretty good (rare enough, given all the White House meddlers) you may still have to look down one day and find some speaker like Jimmy Carter delivering it from your lap. And anyway, modern-day presidents don't really want the citizenry to know quite what they are saying. Such lines as "There is nothing wrong with America that cannot be cured by what is right with America" (speechwriter David Kusnet ventriloquizing for Clinton) or "I ask you to live your lives and hug your children" (Karen Hughes pulling W's strings) or "The kids, like all kids, love the dog and I just want to say this right now, that regardless of what they say about it, we're going to keep it" (vice presidential candidate Richard Nixon spoon-fed by—who knows? It's not in the book) most often provoke a simple reaction in the listener: Huh? What the hell is the Big Guy trying to say?

Like many historians, Schlesinger the Younger draws no obvious conclusions (the book might have been better if he had); but if one can extrapolate, it does seem that he dates the downfall of speechwriting to Lyndon Johnson. It was Johnson who advised his aides, "You've got to write it so that the charwoman who cleans the building across the street can understand it."

Unfortunately, after a year or so, the average LBJ speech sounded as though the charwoman had written it. This was the result, as the author reveals in a footnote (again referencing his father) of the president's insistence that every sentence had to be made into a new paragraph. Schlesinger the Elder was clearly disgusted on being given these instructions by Theodore Sorenson: "The real triumph is to divide each sentence into several paragraphs," he wrote in his journal in 1964.

If only Schlesinger the Younger shared that wicked touch. Footnotes are the usual repository of such insights as the book has to offer. It is only in brackets, for example, that we learn that, after the Lewinsky scandal erupted, "the need to excise potential double entendres did not end with the State of the Union; some speechwriters kept a running list of deleted lines that became 'very, very long.'" In another, we discover that Peggy Noonan never has managed to figure out why she assigned such a very high number to her points of light: "A thousand clowns, a thousand days," she ruminates, "a hundred wasn't enough." And in a third exhilarating footnote, the author mentions that when Hendrick Hertzberg, then a ghostwriter for a defeated Jimmy Carter, was packing up, he was good enough to leave a vital six-word message on the word processor: "Get your mess privileges right away."

Ken Khachigian, who wrote for Ronald Reagan, recognizing the symbolic and practical value of spending a companionable lunch with the bigwigs, did just that. Which—who knows exactly what jump-starts history?—may account for a lot of other interesting events that occurred during that administration. ♦

Rhymers' Dictionary

Defining the moderns. **BY JOHN SIMON**

It is not an easy task to find the right reviewer for poetry. Many reviewers who can handle all kinds of prose well enough find poetry rather beyond them. Enlisting poets for the job raises different problems: Most are uneager to get tough with fellow poets, who may be friends or, worse yet, their own future reviewers. Moreover, negative reviews may further marginalize the precarious status of poetry in our time.

Furthermore, poetry, the most ancient of verbal arts, finds it harder and harder to be original after having been around for at least two-and-a-half millennia. Unlike painting, it cannot go abstract; unlike music, it cannot turn atonal. "Unfortunately for Gertrude Stein," Harry Levin once remarked, "words have meanings."

Good poetry criticism can still be useful, as evidenced by young Adam Kirsch's *The Modern Element.* Kirsch is an accomplished critic of both prose and verse, and is himself a poet. His reviews have appeared in the *New Criterion*, the *New Yorker*, and the *New Republic*, and he is a regular book critic of the *New York Sun.* But he has also published verse in various places and has recently brought out his second volume of poetry.

The Modern Element
Essays in Contemporary Poetry
by Adam Kirsch
Norton, 288 pp., $25.95

So what, exactly, does *The Modern Element* comprise? Reviews of 23 established modern poets, and a 24th joint one of four younger poets coming into their own. There is an introduction that generalizes about poetry, an essay entitled "Two Modern Classics: *The Waste Land* and *Howl*," and another about the extremely idiosyncratic poet-critic Yvor Winters. The tailpiece, "The Modern Element in Criticism," acts as a sort of summation.

One cannot but admire Kirsch's erudition, incisiveness, and eminent read-

John Simon writes about theater for Bloomberg News.

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ability, as well as his willingness to stick his neck out. I do, however, regret his writing only about those poets whose new publications he had to review. Unlike, say, Richard Howard in *Alone With America*, he does not roam freely across the field; there are no reviews of such important poets as James Dickey, Thom Gunn, Ted Hughes, Galway Kinnell, W.S. Merwin, and W.D. Snodgrass, among others.

There remains, for my more unforgiving taste, a little too much clemency in Kirsch's dislikes. In my view, the critic is a bit too tolerant of the likes of Jorie Graham and the overrated farceur John Ashbery, whom Kirsch, though not fooled, lets off too leniently.

But let us start with the introduction, where he waffles a little about Matthew Arnold, whose ideas on poetry he both praises and questions. He quotes Arnold's censure of Lucretius as "over-strained, gloom-weighted, morbid; and he who is morbid is no adequate interpreter of his age." Kirsch comments: "Arnold's hopeful, not to say wishful, definition of the modern would not be conclusively displaced until poets came to agree that, on the contrary, it is precisely the morbid poet who is the adequate interpreter of the modern age." He correctly sees that Arnold's notion of the modern as mastering complexity is superseded by T.S. Eliot's surrender to it: "We can only say that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*." Which Kirsch amplifies as "exemplary specimen or willing victim."

This, in turn, leads him to the virtues and vices of modern poetry. The virtues are

> [D]aring honesty, an intimate (if not always explicit) concern with history, and a determination to make language serve as the most accurate possible means of communication, even at the risk of estrangement. The vices, which correspond to the virtues and call them into question, are sentimental egotism, an obsession with staying up-to-date, and a belief that distortion of language is interesting and praiseworthy in its own right.

Let us see how Kirsch handles some specific poets. I have my doubts about the notion that Trinidad's Derek Walcott may be the greatest poet now alive, but I agree that "Walcott may proclaim the vigor and beauty that accompany the naivete of the Antilles, but cannot help feeling the loss of allusive possibilities that naivete brings with it." A fine example, this, of Kirsch's ability to see both sides of a problem.

About the unconscionable but highly successful Jorie Graham (for whom the all-powerful Helen Vendler managed to get a Harvard professorship) we read, "There is a distinction . . . between the difficulty of obscurity and the difficulty of complexity. . . . As long as Graham asks the reader to fill in her blanks and solve for her X's, she has not realized poetry's greatest and most enduring possibilities," which, though a trifle overpolite, hits the nail on the head.

James Merrill

BETTMANN / CORBIS

About John Ashbery, Kirsch is even better: "Like God, [Ashbery] is most easily defined by negatives. His poems have no plot or argument, no sustained mood or definite theme. They do not even have meaningful titles." You must "plod through a dismaying expanse of trivia, jokes, bent grammar, and nonsense . . . for his five or ten lines of epiphany." For me, even these epiphanies are three-dollar bills.

Kirsch is very good about Geoffrey Hill, a difficult poet, but whose complexities are worth grappling with. Although he shows due respect, he deftly puts his finger on what is problematic about Hill: "He writes about religion, rather than faith; about history, rather than experience; about morality, rather than conscience. That is, he addresses these things not as existential challenges, but as abstract themes and subjects." This is criticism of a high order, as is the entire essay on Hill. (My only cavil is that he does not seem to recognize, concerning one of Hill's volumes in 120 sections, the allusion to the Marquis de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom*.)

Nothing could be more pointed than Kirsch's skewering of that deplorable charlatan Frederick Seidel's poems, which "give the sense of a man wholly inside his obsessions; indeed the obsessions seem to be writing the poems . . . not the contented solipsism of the egoist, more like the desperation of the madman, or the damned soul."

In assessing Louise Glück, he does encounter some contented solipsism. He admires Glück's "serious book of essays, *Proofs & Theories* . . . discredit[ing] confessional 'honesty' and 'courage' as poetic values," and approves of its polemical thrust for authenticity rather than gushily narcissistic "sincerity." Nevertheless, in her own poetry, "Glück has tried on very many costumes from the wardrobe of myth: Joan of Arc, Abishag, Circe, Penelope, Persephone. But the voice that issues from behind all these masks is recognizably the same, the voice of a poet entranced by her own dark resonance." Moreover, "the intoxication with myth seems to give her a factitious strength."

But Kirsch is not only good at carping. He is equally perceptive positively, as when he finds in Charles Simic "poetry that can succeed, even magnificently, when it preserves a sense of the radical strangeness of Being, and of our perception of it: what Simic brilliantly calls "the blossomlike / White erasure / Over a huge, / Furiously crossed-out something."

The essay on James Merrill is one of the finest and most extensive in the book. Here Kirsch observes that "'Luxurious' is . . . an apt description of Merrill's poetry, which is superfi-

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cial in the most deliberate sense: it is profoundly concerned with surfaces." And further, "If we ask what Merrill's form affirms, the answer can only be: form itself." Through salient examples and cogent arguments, Kirsch concludes that "the Augustan Age would have been the perfect setting for Merrill's gifts." It was "an era in which the poet could take much for granted. . . . There would have been no question . . . of his . . . poetry being too beautiful to be great."

Kirsch may not regard Richard Wilbur quite as highly as I do, but he does appreciate this great poet's problem: "How does a poet who feels himself, in the words of an early poem, 'Obscurely yet most surely called to praise,' practice that calling in an age when poetry is overwhelmingly drawn to crisis, confession, and complaint?"

Shrewdly perceptive is the observation that "[Theodore] Roethke knows only one" part of human experience, "Yet that part is exceptionally hard to capture in words . . . that Roethke did capture it, in a handful of poems, guarantees him a permanent place in American poetry." Still, he observes that Roethke and his talented disciple James Wright "allow the poet to be too easy on himself, to believe that the right feeling is more important than good writing," which, to my mind, does not apply to some of Wright's best poems.

Kirsch does, however, strongly approve of Czesław Miłosz's late period, "in which the poet's calling is reimagined as one of remembrance and stewardship. This is Miłosz's answer to the problem of how to serve history without emptily (and cruelly) endorsing whatever happens to happen." Of another Eastern European, likewise turned English poet, Joseph Brodsky, whose overratedness he doesn't feel quite as strongly as I do, he nevertheless writes, "It is impossible to read Brodsky's *Collected Poems in English* as though they were the work of an American poet—they aren't, and they don't sound as if they were." (In this essay he unfortunately misspells the wonderful Louis MacNeice as "MacNiece.")

Kirsch is highly pertinent also about Sharon Olds and her "still thrashing in repression's grip." He notes that "Everything bodily, everything sexual, is hurled at the Father-God, with the fury of a tongue-tied infant's insult. But the tragedy of such Satanic rebellion is only a step away from comedy, once we realize that the all-powerful patriarch is a Wizard of Oz, that the rebellion is as unnecessary as the tyranny is imaginary." Further, "Only a world-class narcissist could so casually annex the Holocaust as a symbol for the antipathy for her father."

In the piece on Eliot's "The Waste Land" and Ginsberg's "Howl," as age-defining poems there is not that much that is new, but Kirsch does go into their place in history, gives an intelligent summary of what they are about, and distinguishes between what in them is dated and what remains relevant. About "Howl," we get the useful insight that "the energetic expression of an error can be wonderfully good poetry."

Something similar emerges about Yvor Winters. A fanatical advocate of rational control in poetry, he managed to be right in his high expectations but errant in their application. As Kirsch writes, "What makes Winters seem perverse is that he will neither avoid art for the sake of morality, nor broaden his narrow morality for the sake of art; instead he tries to make art conform to the demands of morality. It is a Procrustean solution, and it leads him to amputate much of the corpus of English poetry." Still, we should read him, "to learn from [his] insights, from his example—and from his mistakes."

And speaking of mistakes, Kirsch is too human not to make some of his own, albeit far slighter than Winters's. So we find the weird coinage "historicality" for historicity, "a poem like this," osso bucco twice as "osso buco" (in a piece nicely dismantling Billy Collins), "the most naughty thing" for naughtiest, and the questionable use of "intriguing." And he fails to explain the full meaning of the title of a volume by A.E. Stallings, *Hapax*. Yes, it is the Greek for "once," but importantly, it occurs in the phrase *hapax legomenon*, designating a word found only once in a dead language, and thus of uncertain meaning, which is Stallings's little irony about the uniqueness but also dubiety attaching to her poems.

The final piece, "The Modern Element in Criticism," is Kirsch's finest, and ought to be required reading. In seven pages the author covers the ways and dead ends of modern poetry criticism and modern poetry itself, though not without apt backward glances at Plato, Aristotle, and a representative Renaissance poet-critic, Sir Philip Sidney. No high point is bypassed, and there are unexpected but telling references attesting to wide but lightly worn erudition.

Witty observations crop up, e.g., "The poetry criticism of the last century often sounds like a madhouse, with each patient floridly expounding his delusion." But already for the Romantic critic, "not philosophy but poetry became the ladder on which to ascend to the heavens. . . . It removes poetry from the realm of worldly understanding and secular skill. Instead of an art, poetry becomes a magic."

By the mid-20th century, "the new ideal of a poem [is] a faithful record of experience." The search was not for transcendence, only for authenticity. This was the great refusal, "the immolation of meter, rhyme, and form." Kirsch elaborates and illustrates, and then notes, "In the last twenty or thirty years . . . some influential [poets and critics] have turned from literary questions to sociological ones," but this doesn't yield great poetry either.

So he advocates "a saner, more sophisticated, more humane tradition in criticism . . . the pragmatic tradition of Aristotle and Horace, Johnson and Arnold. If we embrace it, we will not need to look to poetry for transcendence, or to flee into aestheticism when transcendence fails, or to flee into authenticity when aestheticism fails."

As against the "poets of otherworldly magniloquence and hectic experimentation," he holds up "poets of humane insight, Hardy, Frost, Moore, Larkin and [though I question this] Lowell." His solution derives from Horace: "Of writing well, be sure, the secret lies / In wisdom: therefore study to be wise." ♦

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Keeping Score

History is made, then recorded, and recorded again.

BY JAMES M. BANNER JR.

The historical study of historical thought and writing—what historians call historiography—has long been the basis of historians' work. To function as professionals, they must know the interpretive history of their subjects, whether they be the fall of Rome, the American Revolution, or the causes of World War II.

A History of Histories
Epics, Chronicles, Romances and Inquiries from Herodotus and Thucydides to the Twentieth Century
by John Burrow
Knopf, 544 pp., $35

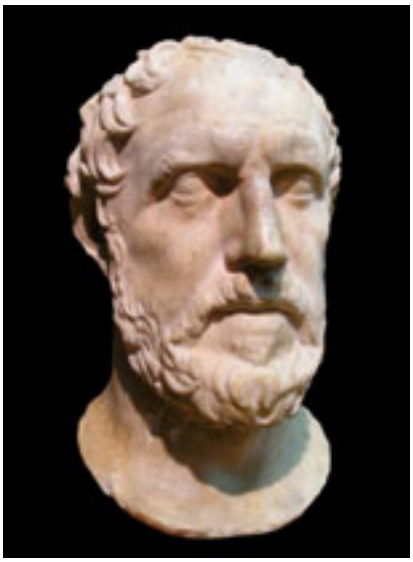
Yet historians rarely pursue the larger subject of the history of all history itself, and many never directly acquaint themselves with the works of the great master historians. Their reason? The mistaken assumption that new evidence and deeper understanding have long ago superseded many of the masters' interpretations. Why bother with what's been surpassed—except, perhaps, in literary merit?

What's more, too many practicing historians are introduced to the subject (as I was) in dreary required courses in historiography at the start of their graduate preparation when they're just gaining their professional legs, don't yet know where they're headed, and aren't yet able to comprehend fully why they're being made to study ancient texts. Nor are they likely to have encountered historiography as undergraduate majors of history. As a forthcoming report prepared for the Teagle Foundation by the National History Center indicates, few undergraduate courses in the subject are offered at all by American colleges and universities. No wonder that the history of history enjoys so few students.

Fortunately, however, when it does attract scholars, it attracts good ones indeed, as it has John Burrow, a respected historian of 19th-century thought and a biographer of Edward Gibbon. *A History of Histories* joins the distinguished, but rare, company of comprehensive, modern histories of historical thought, of which the best recent examples are Ernst Breisach's synthesis, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval & Modern* and Donald R. Kelley's three volumes (*Faces of History*, *Fortunes of History*, and *Frontiers of History*), which also cover the history of history since ancient times. Burrow is livelier reading than Breisach, intended for a broader audience than Kelley. All three are worth the effort, but none can take the place of the originals—Herodotus, Tacitus, Macaulay, and the rest—as their three authors would readily agree.

Burrow brings to his project a refreshing zest, seductive enough to make you think that, rather than reading the originals, you might rely on his evaluations of the great masters' works rather than reading them. You would not go far wrong to do so—if only as an introduction. Even without the credulous curiosity of Herodotus, the gravity of Thucydides, the rolling periods of Gibbon, or the propulsive sweep of Carlyle, Burrow effectively gets you inside his subjects' minds without surrendering his own critical sense. This is of double benefit: You get balanced interpretations of the great histories, along with evidence of a thoroughly modern mind at work on them. Even if Burrow's won't be (because it can't be) the last word on any of his subjects, what he writes is unfailingly solid, sometimes delightful, always keenly considered.

Burrow commences his tale, as he must, with Egyptian and Babylonian record keepers. But as he quickly makes clear, history as more than a chronicle of dates and deeds—history as a purposeful inquiry to discover and explain the past as well as to commemorate its leading figures and great events—commences properly with Herodotus and his history of the war between the Greek states and the Persian empire. This great Greek historian set into a kind of intellectual amber many of the enduring themes of Western historiography: the conflict between East and West and between Western freedom and Oriental despotism, the dangers of imperial overreach, and the corruptions of power. It was also Herodotus who ventured down the paths of social and cultural history, and whose ethnographic researches and interviews prefigured the methods of modern historical inquiry.



Thucydides

Yet Herodotus' history quickly was challenged by that of his near contemporary, Thucydides, the result being centuries of tension and disagreement within historical circles as to how best to do history and what to focus on. Cynical, insisting on confirming his sources, and a believer in *realpolitik*, Thucydides believed that all history is contemporary history. Like the great Greek dramatists, he believed that we might learn from history because human nature doesn't change, and he endowed histori-

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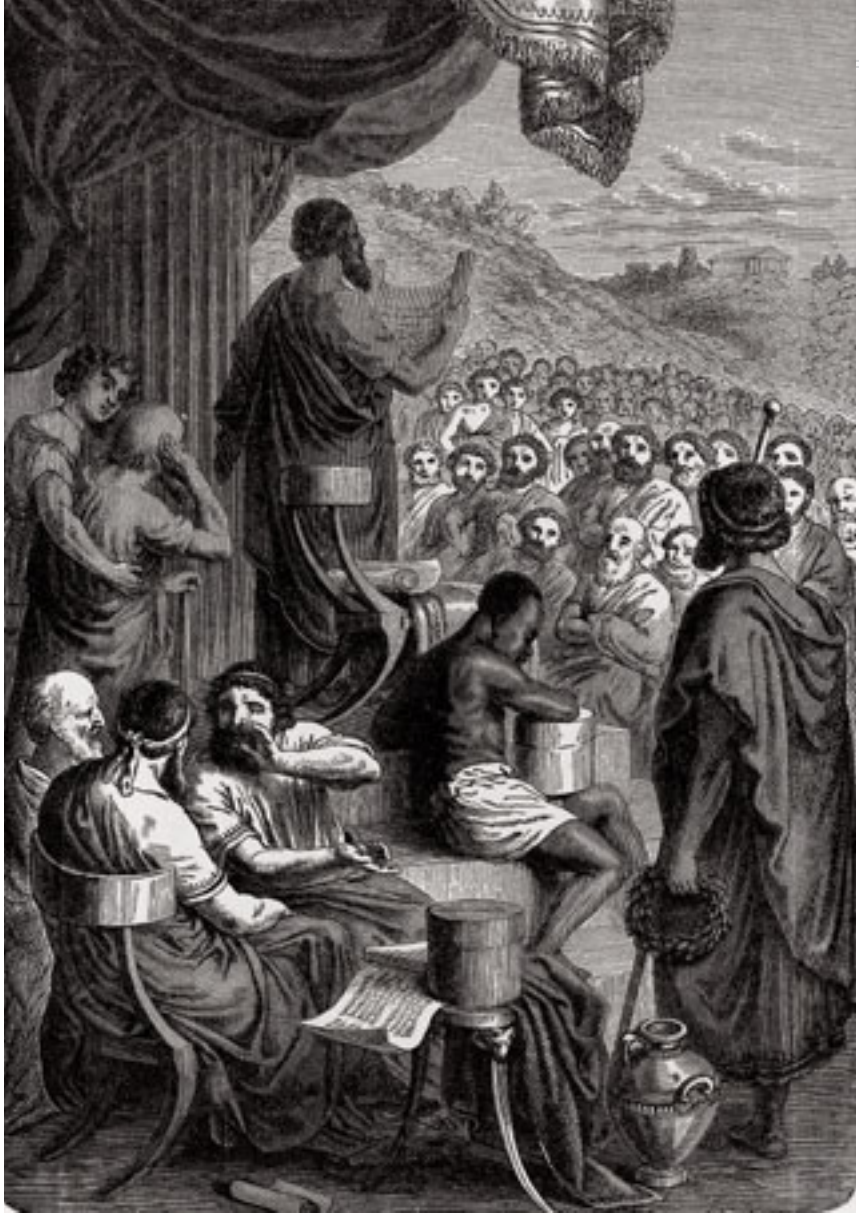

Herodotus reading

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cal thought with themes of tragedy and inevitability that it has never lost. When we complain that history has wandered from its only justifiable foundations in political and military history, or when we argue that human nature is fixed and not plastic, we're really in the grip of arguments that the ancients themselves waged. We have not escaped them and probably never will.

Nor, as Burrow shows, can any of us in the modern West—historian or otherwise—shake off the ways of viewing the past that the successors of the Greeks left to us. The Romans, and especially Polybius, bequeathed to us the aspiration to write a universal history (what we now call world history) and to make historical knowledge useful. And in throwing off the paganism of the ancients, their Christian legatees such as Eusebius and Bede tossed us the challenge of wrestling with the warring themes of historical progress and teleology on one hand and of recurring cycles of history on the other.

By examining (if in necessarily less detail) the many modern historical battles over the past and the methods used to interpret it—including philosophical attacks upon Whig history, the ideological warfare kicked up by Marxism, and the ruckus over the intrusion of theory into history—Burrow implies that contemporary historians, if not always giants of style and view, need yield little to the great figures of yore. After all, he writes in closing, however much we may argue about the past and ways to pursue knowledge of it, history will continue to be written in a never-ending conversation about where we have come from and where we might be going.

In writing this sweeping work, Burrow comes up against two limitations that cannot fairly be debited to his account. The first, which he acknowledges (and which is embodied in the indefinite article of the book's title), is that this is a history of Western historiography, not of all histories, even all great ones, ever written. Burrow is silent about the great Chinese historians, both ancient and modern, and about the master 14th-century Spanish-Arab Ibn Khaldun, sometimes considered the father of historiography. More regrettable is that he doesn't reflect extensively about some of the great Western students of historiography, such as Arnaldo Momigliano. To be sure, he relies on them; but so key are they to his story that their absence is lamentable.

The second limitation of the book, an artifact of Western history itself, is that any historian who undertakes the task that Burrow essays gets caught in a kind of double bind. At the start of the story are large gaps in time and in the record; centuries go by without a historian of note, sometimes even of a historian whose work has survived. Then, starting in the 18th century, the pace of historical research and interpretation picks up—as does, increasingly, the number of practicing historians—so that by our own time Burrow is forced to mention many names without lingering over any. The result is, toward the end of his work, some loss of the considered tone and leisurely pace of the rest.

In addition to knowledge and sheer pleasure, what can a reader take away from *A History of Histories*? This book, like other works of historiography, should lay to rest many misapprehensions about what has come in recent years to be known pejoratively as "revisionism" and "revisionist history." Revisions of previous histories have been with us from the start. Thucydides took issue with Herodotus, who himself here and there corrected Homer and expressed skepticism about the Homeric epics. Thus, at the very inauguration of history's history 2,500 years ago, the debates and tensions between

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myth and fact, and between what we now call social and cultural history (Herodotus) and political, military, and institutional history (Thucydides), were with us. They have never been stilled. Historians, like other thinkers, are always looking over their shoulders at their predecessors, entering into discussion and debate with them, suffering the anxieties of their influence.

Second, historians have always taken issue with each other and adopted rival explanations of events. Dispute is built into the fabric of history. And why shouldn't it be? After all, history is a branch of human thought, and historians are humans. Expecting historians to agree and make nice with each other more than other humans do is like expecting the lion to suckle the lamb.

Third, since history is evidence-based, and since new evidence is always being unearthed, we are all revisionists now, as the noted historian of Ireland Roy Foster once said. We are all forced somehow to integrate into our knowledge and understanding facts that surprise us, that don't fit easily with what we thought we knew. Whether we like revisionism or not, the growing stock of historical evidence, and the advance of ways to think about it, won't let us be anything but revisionists.

It would be a mistake to conclude from all this that Burrow's work is only for the philosophically inclined, or only for those who want their reading on the heavy side. Burrow is light when appropriate, broad-ranging always. Of Gregory of Tours's *History of the Franks* he writes that it is "Trollope with bloodshed." Carlyle's *French Revolution* reminds him of Sergei Eisenstein's handling of crowd scenes, "with the camera panning in and out from the most highly individualized close-up moments to the widest perspectives." Nor is Burrow beyond entering his own convictions on the record. But overall, he lets other historians speak in their own voices through apt quotation.

It would be hard to conceive of a work that better reveals its author's modesty, his command of the literature, his stylistic flair, and his penetrating reflections than this readable, fascinating, learned history of some of the greatest histories the world has known. ♦

Here's My Plan

Winning blue-collar votes in red states.

BY MATTHEW CONTINETTI

A few months back, Barack Obama explained why he had not won more support from voters in Appalachia.

> You go into some of these small towns in Pennsylvania, and like a lot of small towns in the Midwest, the jobs have been gone now for 25 years and nothing's replaced them. And they fell through the Clinton administration, and the Bush administration, and each successive administration has said that somehow these communities are gonna regenerate, and they have not. And it's not surprising, then, they get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment, as a way to explain their frustrations.

Grand New Party
How Republicans Can Win the Working Class and Save the American Dream
by Ross Douthat and Reihan Salam
Doubleday, 256 pp., $23.95

The onetime lecturer in law was addressing a phenomenon that has puzzled liberals for years: Since it is self-evident to them that liberal economic policies benefit working-class voters (defined, for our purposes, as voters without college degrees), why does the working class so often support conservatives? The liberal answer, with which Obama appears to agree, is that the working-class voter is either fooled or scared—never persuaded—into voting on cultural, not economic, grounds.

The conservative authors of *Grand New Party* largely agree with this analysis. The difference is that Ross Douthat and Reihan Salam argue it is entirely rational for working-class voters to cast ballots on social and cultural concerns. That's because issues "from abortion and marriage law to the death penalty and immigration" are "at the *root* of working-class insecurity." They reverse the left's chain of causation. Whereas the left says social pathologies result from economic immiseration, Douthat and Salam say that economic anxiety increases in direct proportion to social instability.

(Full disclosure: The article that served as the basis of *Grand New Party* first appeared in these pages—"The Party of Sam's Club," November 14, 2005—and the authors are my friends.)

Douthat and Salam argue it is rational for working-class voters to cast ballots on social and cultural concerns, as economic anxiety increases in direct proportion to social instability.

It's hard to disagree with them. The social disruptions of the last 40 years—rising levels of divorce, illegitimacy, drug use, and crime—have hit voters without college degrees the hardest. Those disruptions prevent the formation of stable families. And without stable families, people lack both a refuge from and a mechanism by which to

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cope with larger structural changes in the global economy.

No family, less stability, less of a chance to improve one's condition.

This is bad for the working class, for America, and for the GOP. Republicans all too often come into power backed by working-class majorities, only to alienate those majorities and get tossed out of office. Douthat and Salam want to break the cycle. They think a conservative politics offers the best chance for a strong and prosperous America, and write that it is therefore necessary for conservatives to reform the "welfare state so that it serves the interests of the working class, rather than the affluent."

In so doing, the Republican party may forge a "conservative class consciousness among working-class voters." And this, in turn, would create a "unity of political allegiance and socioeconomic identity that, in its liberal form, made the Roosevelt coalition so potent and enduring."

Voilà—there's your lasting Republican majority. Clearly the left has not cornered the market on audacity.

Grand New Party is an unusual book: part history, part political analysis, part policy brief. It challenges the widely held idea on the right that the GOP isn't small-government enough. And at a time when the word "neocon" is a slur, Douthat and Salam argue that the GOP is most successful when it governs according to the principles of "applied neoconservatism." By this they mean "a conservatism that promised to fix the welfare state, rather than abolish it; to reform the Great Society, but leave the New Deal more or less intact."

How to do this? The authors have plenty of ideas. Some are plausible, others are implausible, and still others are a mixture of both. For example, Douthat and Salam back a dramatic expansion of the child-tax credit—a sensible idea that could conceivably become law. But then they muse that, in order to stigmatize illegitimacy, the credit ideally would be "targeted to married couples (and extended to widows and widowers, and possibly divorcees) and withheld from single and cohabiting parents." Not gonna happen.

George W. Bush greets welders in Frederick, Maryland, January 18, 2008.

SAUL LOEB / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Large portions of the book are written in the language of subsidies and tax credits and public "investments." The libertarians among us are likely to blanch, even pass out. To increase the time mothers are able to spend raising children, Douthat and Salam propose "subsidies to parents who provide child care in the home and pension credits that reflect the economic value of years spent in household labor." To reward work, they write that a "program of wage subsidies" is a "tool that's worth considering."

All of these ideas will cost money; it's unclear how much. The authors provide neither a cost estimate nor a means to pay for the new expenditures. It's simply assumed that the money will be there, or that revenues will rise to cover the cost of the new programs. And while Douthat and Salam are probably more open than other conservatives to increasing revenue by raising taxes, they avoid the question of which taxes ought to be raised, and by how much.

This raises a larger criticism, which is that the authors neglect economic growth. They seem more concerned with how to spend the money that a free economy generates. But without growth there is no revenue for wage subsidies. Without growth, all classes stagnate. As Irving Kristol has written, "It was only the prospect of economic growth in which everyone prospered, if not equally or simultaneously, that gave modern democracies their legitimacy and durability." Douthat and Salam often appear to assume that government programs are the only way to help the working class. Not so. Growth helps, too.

Grand New Party is about domestic policy. But it is also worth considering the role national security has played in winning working-class support for the GOP. Reaganism combined a stirring belief in American exceptionalism with a commitment to American military strength. This marriage of American ideals and American power has been key to every successful Republican campaign in the last quarter-century, and nowhere is this more clear than in presidential contests. Who is the only Democrat to have won the presidency since Jimmy Carter, the only one to win reelection since Franklin Roosevelt? Bill Clinton. When did he hold office? During a time when America was widely perceived to be at peace.

The national security issue cuts both ways. Douthat and Salam barely mention what they call President Bush's "failure in Iraq." This gives short shrift to the most important issue of our time. The war on terror, of which Iraq is a part, has helped and hurt Bush among voters without college degrees. Congressional Republicans won the working-class vote in 2004 when the war in Iraq was increas-

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ingly unpopular but also seen as winnable. By 2006 Iraq was in chaos, the war was even more unpopular, and voters began to think the effort was a lost cause. Republican congressional candidates won only 43 percent of the working-class vote. The Democrats swept back into power with a narrow congressional majority. The Iraq war, not the absence of a "world-class telecommuting infrastructure," drove the working-class vote into the Democrats' eager embrace.

How long will that embrace last? One troubling sign for Republicans is Obama's recent hiring of Jason Furman as policy adviser. Furman is a centrist economist whom Douthat and Salam cite repeatedly. He's just the sort of guy who could adopt the message of *Grand New Party* and use it to further Democratic ends. Meanwhile, Obama seems open to the populist messages of Democrats like James Webb of Virginia and Sherrod Brown of Ohio. He could mix populist rhetoric and center-left economic policy into a potent brew. It may be awhile before the working class gets its fill.

But not necessarily, for two reasons. First, Obama's ideological commitments to familial diversity, feminism, affirmative action, *Roe* v. *Wade*, and all the other shibboleths of social liberalism will inevitably spur a reaction among working-class voters. It's just a question of whether that happens before or after he becomes president.

Second, Iraq in 2008 is nothing like Iraq in 2006. The war is not a "failure." Voters are beginning to realize this. They may have reached a consensus that the war should not have been fought, but they are ambivalent about how to go forward. They trust John McCain's national security judgment. They are uncertain that a 46-year-old lawyer who seemingly came out of nowhere four years ago is a plausible commander in chief. McCain's job is to convince them that he is not.

This may be enough to win the working-class back from the Democrats in 2008. Those Republicans who want to keep them would do well to read this learned, judicious, and enjoyable book. ♦

Identity Theft

A rediscovered classic of souls in transition.

BY EDITH ALSTON

By the time the feckless young Sheppard Lee discovers himself dead, in the vicinity of the corpulent remains of John Hazlewood Higginson, which he will soon occupy, Lee has laid waste to his inheritance, rejected marriage on the grounds of the nuisance he sees in fathering children, and dipped into local politics enough to be cheated by the party he's helped bring to power.

Sheppard Lee
Written by Himself
by Robert Montgomery Bird
NYRB Classics, 472 pp., $16.95

"The scoundrels!" he exclaimed after the job he was promised has, instead, gone to the party member who promised it to him:

> I perceived that I had fallen among thieves; it was clear that no party could be in the right, which was led by such unprincipled men; there was corruption at the heart of the whole body . . . their honesty was a song—their patriotism was a farce. In a word, I found I had joined the wrong party.

Shortly, claiming his story will be neither "a dissertation on politics, nor on morals either," Lee is beginning to expound on both.

Readers will barely be settled into the saddle of this rollicking, satirical ride of a novel when its author introduces the unsettling literary device of metempsychosis, meaning the transfer of souls from one body to another, a term widely understood when this book first came out, in 1836, during the presidency of Andrew Jackson.

In playful recognition of the story it told, the volume didn't carry the name of its actual author, Robert Montgomery Bird. At 30, Bird was a successful writer of popular entertainment, the Michael Crichton or Aaron Sorkin of his day: Crichton for his extrapolation of the social from the medical, and Sorkin for his capacity to inhale the *zeitgeist* and exhale it as witty dialogue and circumstance. In its merry mix of the macabre and jaunty pace, *Sheppard Lee* will seem strikingly contemporary to anyone who has recently dipped into TV, from its shades of the shades in *Six Feet Under* to the overleaping of mortality suggestive of *New Amsterdam* to the whimsical contrivances keeping characters alive in *Pushing Daisies*.

Trained as a physician in bustling Philadelphia, Bird had discovered he didn't like charging patients or failing to heal them, and abandoned clinical practice after less than a year. His true calling (or one of them) had meanwhile emerged in medical school, as a scribbler of poetry, prose, and plays. When Edwin Forrest, the country's most prominent young actor, set up a playwriting competition, Bird won it four times; his 1831 work was *The Gladiator*, about the slave revolt led by Spartacus, and the star vehicle for which Forrest was best known throughout his career. Bird was the same age as Forrest and toured with him awhile, until their friendship ended in a money dispute. By the mid-1830s Bird was turning out a novel a year.

Edgar Allan Poe hailed *Sheppard Lee* as "an original in *American* Belles Lettres," and a sign of a promising literary future for the young nation. Poe himself was then only 26, and unknown except as a reporter and literary critic, when he faulted the writer's use of metempsychosis, claiming that the

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spirit passing from Sheppard Lee into seven other bodies should be constant in nature. Two years later, Poe would turn the device to his own ends in "Lygeia," which would become one of his most famous stories, while in Bird's use of it he had entirely missed the point.

Slipped into the unruly body of John Hazlewood Higginson, the mind—or spirit, or soul—of Sheppard Lee is launched on an adventure that ranges over a goodly portion of the social and geographical landscape of early 19th-century America, passing from the madcap brewer into a penniless dandy, a stingy moneylender and a thick-headed Quaker philanthropist before being conveyed below the Mason Dixon line to inhabit a plantation slave and rich Virginia landowner.

In his introduction, Christopher Looby calls Lee an "identity thief," trying on lives, and almost apologetically labels Bird's story a "rueful comedy" and "weird book" before establishing it as quite a bit more than that. For one thing, it is the perfect instrument for a writer with a physician's curiosity and a philosophical bent, wanting both to probe at the point where the nature of the physical human body intersects with the universal human condition, and to scan the wide-open landscape of a country still groping for its national identity.

Looby probes at points where Bird's views of the self intersect with the 18th-century ideas of David Hume—and possibly even resonate in neuroscience today. As to whether to ground yourself in the substantial introduction before or after reading this novel, it's a hard call, when the story itself is such a colorful romp through affairs of society, the pocketbook, and the heart. Beyond the comedy in each opportunistic shift into the next body, the story dips twice into murkier depths: first when the old moneylender finds that his sons have learned the lessons of his miserliness too well, and then when the Quaker, kidnapped and conveyed to Virginia, lands in a slave named Tom.

In 1831, Walt Whitman (also a reporter at the time) wrote that *The Gladiator* was "as full of 'Abolitionism' as an egg is meat." That same year, America was rocked by the slave rebellion in Virginia led by Nat Turner, which left 55 white people dead and Turner hanged. Five years later slavery was still the country's most festering issue when Bird chose to step back, taking the traveler's more remote (if reflective) view, panning from the cabin of the field slave to the big house of his benignly condescending owner, to encompass the tragedy inflicted by an uprising on innocent lives.

A contemporary of Tocqueville, Bird has a similar gift for identifying the political embedded in the social—but with a mischievous eye, and a homeboy's view of his country in early adolescence, struggling to get past its own worst foibles to know itself. A sketcher in his early years, Bird later became a photographer, taught high school in Philadelphia, and was a medical school lecturer. Looby is the professor who unearthed this lovely forgotten work, and brought it to the editors at the *New York Review of Books*, for which we can all be grateful.

Unless you are a scholar of early 19th-century American fiction, Robert Montgomery Bird might well be the most entertaining antebellum novelist you never heard of. ♦

Cops on the Case

Two police procedurals from contemporary Britain.

BY JON L. BREEN

The invention of the police procedural, in recent decades the dominant subgenre of detective fiction, is usually credited to Lawrence Treat, whose *V as in Victim* (1945) put a new emphasis on teamwork in crime detection and on the attitudes and special problems of the law enforcement professional. But it took a radio and television show, *Dragnet*, to popularize the form in media, and Ed McBain's 87th Precinct series to provide its most durable and definitive exemplar in print.

Gone to Ground
by John Harvey
Harcourt/Penzler, 400 pp., $25

The Headhunters
by Peter Lovesey
Soho, 304 pp., $24

Police procedurals have always been about both the cops and the case, but writers differ on where the emphasis should be placed.

Many of the best procedurals have come from Great Britain, where John Harvey and Peter Lovesey are two of the top practitioners. Both are recipients of the Crime Writers Association's Diamond Dagger for lifetime achievement, Lovesey in 2000 and Harvey in 2007. Though they have in common a teaching background, they reached this pinnacle by very different routes.

Lovesey, born in 1936, who began his writing career as a track and field historian, became one of crime fiction's pioneering historical specialists, introducing the Victorian police Sergeant Cribb and Constable Thackeray in *Wobble to Death* (1970) and continuing the series in seven more books, concluding with *Waxwork* (1978), and a brief but distinguished television series. He also wrote historical mysteries, including several about the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII), but began a shift to present-day police novels with *The Last Detective* (1991), introducing the retro-minded Superintendent Peter Diamond.

Harvey, born in 1938, came to prominence much later in his career. He was a prolific writer of young-adult novels, movie novelizations, poetry, radio and

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television plays, and paperback crime and western fiction under at least 10 different names before introducing the Nottingham policeman Charlie Resnick in *Lonely Hearts* (1989), the first of an acclaimed series that was ostensibly ended after 10 novels. It has surprisingly resumed with *Cold in Hand*, not due for publication here until September.

Lovesey's *The Headhunters* and Harvey's *Gone to Ground* represent differing approaches to the cops vs. case dichotomy and to a couple of contemporary trends, both of which reflect the increased feminization of the field, in recognition of its mostly female readership.

Number one, the proportion of female fictional sleuths is greater than ever before. Some procedural writers, notably H.R.F. Keating, have phased out their male detectives in favor of policewomen. Others, including Tony Hillerman, Michael Connelly, Ian Rankin, and P.D. James, have retained their male leads but given them increasingly prominent female partners. Some readers might charge that placing so many policewomen on the crime-fighting front lines is simply unrealistic, but others can counter that detective fiction is a branch of fantasy anyway. Lovesey has taken the first course, more or less abandoning Peter Diamond in favor of the tough, diminutive, and likeable Inspector Hen Mallin, while Harvey writes of a virtually coequal detective team, Will Grayson and Helen Walker.

The second trend, closely related to the cops vs. case question, is more complicated and generally less salutary: the drift to soap opera. While some authors take the time-honored approach of sticking doggedly to the central crime problem or problems, others emphasize the personal lives of the investigators to the point of overshadowing the mystery. Lovesey and Harvey were already exemplifying these differing approaches: Certainly the character of Charlie Resnick has excited more interest than the cases he investigates, and just as surely the Peter Diamond books, despite the complex central character, are more notable for their classically intricate plots.

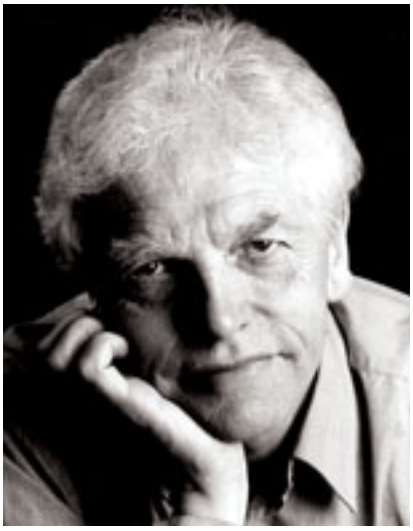
Both new books offer intriguing situations. The victim in *Gone to Ground* is Stephen Bryan, found beaten to death in his shower. A gay academic whose teaching assignment in Anglia Ruskin University's Department of Communication Studies included "courses in British Cinema, Class and Culture, and Sexuality, Gender and Identity," he was working on a book about film star Stella Leonard, whose death was mysterious and whose family has resisted cooperation in the project. The police gradually come to know what the reader has already guessed: Bryan's death has some connection to the 1950s film noir

John Harvey

Shattered Glass, which starred Leonard. Excerpts from the script of the film begin and end the novel and turn up periodically throughout the narrative. Strong as the plot is, the relationship of the police team to each other, and to Grayson's wife Lorraine, who is unhappy about their move from the city to the boondocks, ultimately carries more interest than the mystery. The inevitable sexual tension of the male-female police team hasn't led to any violation of the marital vows, but the reader senses that it could, and wonders how the friendly but uneasy triangle will develop in future novels.

The Headhunters begins in a Chichester Starbucks where two girlfriends, level-headed Jo Stevens, employee of a garden center, and madcap Gemma Casey, who works for a printing firm, are facetiously plotting the murder of Gemma's boss. The discussion widens when Jo and "latest bloke" Rick meet Gemma and her date Jake, an uncommunicative nature conservator, at a bowling alley. When the casual fantasizing gets out of hand and actual murders take place, the action alternates between the involved civilian Jo and Hen Mallin's police team. Lovesey sticks to the case throughout, from that initial meeting to a surprising, but fairly clued, solution. The reader gets to know Mallin and her team very well without dwelling on inessential personal details.

These are both good books, expertly written and constructed, and certainly



Peter Lovesey

recommended. But ultimately Harvey's is about the cops, while Lovesey's is about the case. Without denying Harvey's excellence as a writer, I prefer Lovesey's old-school emphasis on the problem at hand, as well as his credible but elaborate and deceptive plot structure. It's fashionable to distinguish crime novels as either plot-driven or character-driven, with implied preference to the latter; but a novel in this genre should provide both plot and character seamlessly enough to relieve the reader of pondering chicken-or-egg provenance.

It's the approach to plot, after all, that makes the detective story a unique genre. While Harvey balances his elements well, too many of his contemporaries use background and domestic detail to obscure a shortage of the ingenuity that distinguishes the best detective fiction. ♦

HARVEY: PHIL MONK / NEWSCOM; LOVESEY: GILLES PLAZY / OPALE

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"[Sen. John McCain] proposed a $300 million government prize to whoever can develop an automobile battery that far surpasses existing technology. The bounty would equate to $1 for every man, woman and child in the country, 'a small price to pay for helping to break the back of our oil dependency,' McCain said at Fresno State University."

—Associated Press, *June 23, 2008*

NO. 1 IN THE USA

And the winner is...

Flintstone wins $300M prize

Quarry employee builds better battery

Through the courtesy of Fred's two feet: The Flintstones put the town of Bedrock on the map.

By J.B. Shale
USA TODAY

BEDROCK — Fred Flintstone, a genial, 48-year-old bronto crane operator, has been awarded the $300 million McCain Prize, the Energy Department announced yesterday. Flintstone has been commuting to and from his job at the Slate Rock and Gravel Company the same way every day since 1961: propelling his vintage Granitemobile coupe with the power of his two feet, as his father taught him back in his student days at Boulder High School.

"When I learned the government was offering this big prize for a better battery," he told reporters at a press conference at the downtown Loyal Order of Water Buffalos' lodge, "I thought to myself, 'Freddie, m'boy, you've finally hit the big time.'"

Flintstone, a longtime member of the fraternal organization, told reporters that he had chosen this venue because he intends to pledge a portion of his prize money to various local charities, including the Water Buffalo's signature program of free pterodactyl burgers for indigent cavemen.

"Fred's got a heart as big as all outdoors," said his neighbor, self-described best friend, and fellow Water Buffalo, Bernard (Barney) Rubble.

Flintstone, his wife Wilma, daughter Pebbles, and their aging dog Dino, surrounded by cameras and lights, looked as if the reality of their overnight good fortune had not yet sunk in. Pebbles, a sophomore at SUNY Stony Brook, said the family is still deciding what to do with the prize money, "but a trip to Rock Vegas is a pretty sure bet. My dad's been shouting 'Yabba Dabba Doo' every five minutes since we got the news."

Cover Story

According to the U.S. Department of Energy committee that awarded the prize, Flintstone's source of renewable energy is simplicity itself.

"We considered little dinosaurs inside cylinders, even basalt solar panels," said Sydney Quartz, assistant secretary for geologic policy, "but Fred's two feet have met the needs of the modern Stone Age family for over four

Please see COVER STORY next page ▶

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